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ABSTRACT

This guidebook is intended to help school boards focus their efforts on understanding and achieving the elements of their key work. Chapter 1 discusses the concept of systems thinking as a framework for organizational thinking and learning. It also provides an overview of the key work of improving student achievement. This work focuses on eight key actions: vision, standards, assessment, accountability, resource alignment, climate, collaboration, and continuous improvement. Each key action is explored in its own chapter. Each chapter includes a definition and explanation of the key action itself as an element of the key work, a self-assessment tool for gauging one's own initial understanding and the current level of readiness of the board in that element of key work, a list of questions the board should ask itself, an outline differentiating roles and responsibilities of board members and the superintendent, a series of considerations to be taken into account when formulating a plan for action, an annotated list of references, including Internet links, and a case study that illustrates what effective school boards can do to accomplish the key action. The book concludes with a short bibliography, notes about the authors, and a statement of acknowledgements. (RT)

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the Key Work of School Boards

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Guidebook

National School Boards Association

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The Key Work of School Boards Guidebook

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Foreword

These are challenging times for public education, and even more challenging is the work of local school board members. Today's local board of education is the leader on the front lines of public education. The board is responsible for putting in place the proper keystones for students to learn and achieve at the highest level possible. Board members' primary agenda is raising student achievement and engaging the community to attain that goal.

In an effort to help local school boards best fulfill their role, the National School Boards Association has created the Key Work of School Boards, a framework for raising student achievement through community engagement. It is designed to give school boards concrete action tools to help them be effective in their role as community leaders. The framework is based on the premise that excellence in the classroom begins with excellence in the boardroom.

This guidebook provides information for understanding and implementing the Key Work of School Boards. It is intended as a support to help school boards understand and achieve the essential elements of their work. The guidebook provides a framework of eight "key" action areas that successful boards have focused their attention on: vision, standards, assessment, accountability, resource alignment, climate, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

NSBA is proud of the work school boards do and the role they play in creating the quality public education system that is fundamental to a strong democratic society. We offer this guidebook as a resource to help boards of education carry out their responsibilities for creating equity and excellence in public education and for leading the community in preparing all students to succeed in a rapidly changing global society.

Anne L. Bryant
Executive Director

Introduction

Being an effective member of a board of education has always been a challenge, but never more so than today. The Information Age has created demands for instant responsiveness and increased accountability in all facets of society. Nowhere is that increased accountability more acute than in public education.

Improving student achievement through community engagement is the Key Work of School Boards. What can board members do to ensure that their schools meet the demands for increased student achievement? How do they tackle this key work? What are the key elements of this work? What are the actions boards need to take?

This guidebook is intended as a support for school boards to focus their efforts on understanding and achieving the elements of their key work. It speaks to you as a board member and is designed to be user friendly. You can begin at the beginning and read through in sequence or select a different path through the elements depending on your local district's strengths and focus. The guidebook follows a framework of eight "key" action areas that successful boards have all paid attention to. The framework is not a sequence, but it is a system—all of the areas should be addressed by a school district committed to high-quality schools with student achievement as its primary focus.

Chapter 1 briefly discusses the concept of systems thinking as a framework for organizational thinking and learning. Board members with experience in the corporate world may already understand that framework and wish to move directly into the "key actions" chapters (chapters 2-9). Others will find this chapter a good introduction to the principles of systems thinking. Chapter 1 also provides an overview of the key work of improving student achievement. This work focuses on eight key actions: **Vision, Standards, Assessment, Accountability, Resource Alignment, Climate, Collaboration,** and **Continuous Improvement**. (See the diagram below; see also The Key Work of School Boards Web site, http://www.nsba.org/keywork.) The components of each key action are outlined and discussed in the context of the framework.

Each of the following eight chapters explores one of the key actions. These chapters may be read in any order.

They are intended to help you as a board member understand each key work area and decide on actions and resources most needed in your own district. The format for each key action chapter is the same in order to simplify use of the guidebook. Each chapter includes the following:

- A definition and explanation of the key action itself as an element of the key work.
- A self-assessment that allows you to gauge your initial understanding and the current level of readiness of your board in that element of the key work.
- A list of questions that members of the school board should be asking themselves, as well as questions for the superintendent and staff.
- An outline differentiating roles and responsibilities of board members and the superintendent.
- A series of considerations that a school district planning team should take into account as it develops a plan for action.
- An annotated listing of references for additional or more detailed information on that particular key action. These references include Internet links.
- A case study that illustrates what effective school boards can do to accomplish the key action.

This guidebook is not intended to be the single answer to the complexities that face boards of education as they confront the challenges to improving student achievement. Nor is the range of all the possible answers contained in this book. The answers will be as unique as each school district or as each school within the district. You will create many of your own definitions as you refine your learning process. And your state school boards association certainly has training opportunities and materials that can help you address issues unique to your state or community. Through your state school boards association and NSBA's online Resource Exchange Network (*http://www.nsba.org/federation/xchange.html*), every board member has access to useful questions, practical strategies, and resources for implementing the key work. Rely on these local experts to help you sharpen your focus and develop your specific plans.

The purpose of this guidebook is to get you started and to help you develop whatever level of the learning process you find meaningful. Consider this your "Cliffs Notes" rather than the complete textbook. Make it your personal handbook. Write in it. Refer to it whenever you are tackling the challenges of improving student achievement. Monitor your effectiveness by comparing your actions to the actions of other districts. Use the resources to share successes as well as mistakes with other boards of education. Pick it up and put it down. React to it and reflect upon it. Most importantly, understand that this guidebook is for you, to keep you focused on your role in the key work of school boards: improving student achievement.

chapter 1
Systems Thinking

The key work of school boards—student achievement and community engagement to promote student achievement—is becoming recognized nationally as the primary agenda for boards of education. Increasingly, as local boards face the challenges of providing effective governance, they are using their time and energy to focus on these twin imperatives. It is no longer either possible or credible for boards of education to serve as passive reviewers and judges of the work of others. This oversight role, assigned to local boards during the early years of this century as part of progressive efforts to ensure clean government, has been superceded by a new role. Boards today are expected to share responsibility for how well schools and students perform.

In this new era, the role of education as a key broker of personal, social, and economic success has created a new sense of urgency and a realization that the knowledge formerly reserved for college-bound students must be acquired by all students. At the same time, the technological revolution, symbolized by the personal computer and the Internet, is fundamentally changing how we think, work, and play. Learning to work collaboratively with others rather than in competition requires students to learn to think and behave differently. It also requires schools to employ different strategies for teaching and organizing instruction.

Local boards of education should be the "up front" leaders of public education. They are charged with the responsibility of creating the conditions within their school districts that will enable students to meet more rigorous knowledge and performance standards. Creating optimum conditions for teaching and learning is a formidable challenge. It requires that boards understand issues deeply and align the resources and culture of the system to support the work of principals, teachers, and students. It means that boards take responsibility for results even as they hold others in the school district accountable as well. It means that boards articulate the educational mission of the district and garner the public support and resources needed to achieve that mission.

To help local boards carry out their work, the National School Boards Association has developed a framework called the Key Work of School Boards. This framework outlines eight essential areas on which boards need to focus attention:

- Vision
- Standards
- Assessment
- Accountability
- Alignment
- Climate
- Collaborative Relationships
- Continuous Improvement.

The Key Work of School Boards provides a framework for planning and acting that is based on systems thinking. Several frameworks drawn from systems thinking, including the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria, are being used to identify, assess, and benchmark quality organizations in business and industry and, more recently, in education and government as well. Systems thinking is guided by the idea that the behavior of systems follows common principles. The elements of a system continually interact and do so in predictable ways. Systems thinking comprises a body of principles, methods, and tools for understanding these interactions and creating more effective systems.

Those who engage in systems thinking understand that there are no right answers. Actions are not taken in isolation. A systems thinker understands that everything is connected to everything else. The goal of systems thinking is to take those actions that will most positively influence the system as a whole. At the same time, every action has a reaction. That is, each action will produce some desired results and, almost certainly, unintended consequences elsewhere in the system. One of the powers of systems thinking is learning to anticipate those unintended results. Building "worst case scenarios" is one tool for anticipating unintended consequences. Another is to ask the question, "What else may happen if we do this?" Anticipating unintended consequences empowers leaders to modify the original decision or to take additional actions that can mitigate undesired results.

The Key Work of School Boards is a framework designed to foster systems thinking. Using this framework will enable school boards to provide leadership through governance and create the conditions under which excellent teaching and accelerated student performance will take place. We begin with

the premise that excellence in the classroom begins with excellence in the boardroom.

The rest of this chapter provides a brief explanation of each of the key actions and the role it plays in empowering local boards to create quality, results-driven school systems. As you read, keep in mind that "systems thinking" means just that. The key actions do not represent a laundry list of items for boards to check off one by one; in fact, the opposite is true. To be a systems thinker is to realize that it is the whole, not its several parts, that makes the difference; these key actions are both linking and interweaving. Peter Senge, author of The Fifth Discipline, explains this concept by observing that it is impossible to cut an elephant in half and get two smaller elephants.

Vision and Mission

Vision is not about what we are, but what we want to be. Vision captures a critical dimension of dynamic systems. For school boards, it is about where we are going and what kind of school systems we are trying to create now and for the future. A positive vision is future-focused and seeks to shape events rather than simply let them happen. At this turn of the millennium, we hear much about the need for visionary leaders, leaders who are willing to take risks and who call us to larger purposes. In the same way, public education needs visionary school boards that can articulate the goals of public education and engage the community in support of excellent public schools for all children.

Our history as a nation is replete with examples of powerful visions that continue to shape our thinking and actions. The Declaration of Independence is perhaps our most famous example of a powerful and positive vision statement. When the Declaration was penned in 1776, the notion that all men are created equal was itself revolutionary, for it envisioned a social state that did not exist anywhere in the world. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech presented a powerful vision of a societal viewpoint that did not then exist in the United States. John F. Kennedy's vision of space exploration—landing a man on the moon and bringing him back to earth safely—captured the imagination of the American people. It spawned an era of space exploration that simply could not have been imagined 40 years earlier except as science fiction. In modest as well as in these grander contexts, vision is an essential dimension of any effective enterprise.

Positive and inspiring visions require the widespread involvement of those whose lives will be influenced and even shaped by the vision. Powerful visions are the product of endless hours of discussion and dialogue among key stakeholders. Not too many years ago, boards were advised to go behind closed doors, hammer out a vision and mission for the school district, and submit it to the community for reaction and review. Today we know better. We know that without involvement, there is unlikely to be much commitment on the part of those who must be enlisted to achieve the vision. Compliance and commitment represent two very different levels of engagement.

Closely related to vision is mission. At one level, the mission of an organization is what it is created to do. In effective organizations, the mission statement also captures and reflects the core values and beliefs that guide the organization and its members in pursuit of stated aims and goals. Here is one example of a mission statement developed by a school district under the leadership of its elected board: "To shape the future, one child at a time, through a community partnership dedicated to excellence in teaching and learning." A major automobile company talks about its dedication to quality as a primary focus—"At Ford, quality is job one; the quality goes in before the name goes on." In both examples, core values and beliefs and the flavor of the vision are woven into the mission statement. Each also highlights other important features of powerful mission statements: short, succinct, and memorable.

> *"To be a systems thinker is to realize that it is the whole, not its several parts, that makes the difference; ...it is impossible to cut an elephant in half and get two smaller elephants."*

Standards

Another major component of a systems approach is the establishment of standards for performance. Establishing

standards is as important for schools as it is for other enterprises. In systems thinking, major emphasis is given to quality of performance and product. In order to know whether we are performing in accordance with expectations, we need to establish specific and clearly delineated standards. Those standards need to be tied in realistic ways to the expectations of the community and, just as important, to our best intelligence about what knowledge and skills will be needed by future generations as they respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing social and economic landscape.

For school boards, establishing standards for students and teachers that meet these two criteria presents a unique and critical challenge. For one thing, many states have established curriculum content and student performance standards that apply to all public school students. Boards must know what these standards are and how they affect the decisions the board makes. In addition, many states are implementing new graduation requirements that include satisfactory performance on "high stakes" exit examinations. Local boards need to understand what these tests will require, how they are linked to state-established performance standards, and what the impact will be on students who do not perform satisfactorily.

When board members understand what standards are already in place and how they affect students, teachers, and the community, they can incorporate those standards into district-level standards. These district standards will, in most instances, need to be more broadly focused to include the social and personal skills that students will need to acquire in addition to academic knowledge.

One way organizations establish quality performance standards is through benchmarking. Benchmarking involves finding and analyzing the best practices with respect to standards and then developing standards that meet or exceed those benchmarks. For example, if the task facing system leaders is to establish mathematics standards for students at each grade level, a critical step would be to identify a district (or national organization) that has established mathematics standards with outstanding results. This exemplary work becomes the starting point for the standards-setting process in the local district. Benchmarking helps the board by giving it a base for action and helps it avoid reinventing the proverbial wheel.

Establishing standards is one of the board's most important responsibilities. Once standards are in place, the superintendent, working with principals, teachers, and others, is responsible for developing the curricula and identifying and using instructional strategies that will enable students to meet the new standards.

Assessment

Promoting outstanding student performance based on clearly delineated standards is central to the key work of school boards. The next step is to determine how well students are doing in meeting those standards. Effective organizations emphasize assessment for two major reasons. Margaret Wheatley, a student of effective organizations, argues that information informs and forms the individual and the organization. School boards need information in order to make decisions, not only about how well they are doing, but also about what may be needed in order to ensure that system goals will be met. Without that kind of information, boards can end up making decisions that are based on conventional wisdom, hunches, and what worked in the past. In addition, having accurate information about how well students are doing creates the opportunity for the school system to establish a basis for continuous improvement. When school boards have accurate information in usable formats, they have a powerful tool to ensure that the superintendent and staff are using information to improve the delivery of services. When teachers have access to reliable data about how students are doing, those data inform and empower their work with students. They are able to make instructional decisions with far greater precision and effect.

This process amounts to using information as feedback and guide. When Peter Senge refers to the "learning organization," he is talking not about schools but about organizations that are so attuned to their environments that they constantly receive information about how they are doing and use that information to survive and thrive in changing circumstances.

Accountability

Increasingly, local school districts are being held accountable for what happens to students and how well they perform on a variety of assessment measures. Local school boards, similarly, are being held accountable for student performance. Thirty years ago, most school boards did not pay much attention to student achievement, and it was not really expected that they would. Performance of students was the responsibility of the superintendent and staff, and students were routinely tested and placed in programs (sometimes called tracks) that would enable them to be successful. School boards were oversight bodies whose role was to hire the superintendent and ensure that the management of the school district was efficient and effective.

This demarcation of roles worked reasonably well in the Industrial Age, but it fell rapidly from grace in the Information

Age. No longer is it credible for a school system to prepare 25 percent of its students for college and the rest for jobs in factories, the world of business and commerce, and agriculture. In the Information Age, successful workers need the same knowledge and competencies formerly reserved for the college preparatory program. Other factors, including the civil rights movement, also militated against the old arrangement. Fundamental changes in society and the workplace forced a redefinition of the educational requirements for students graduating from high school.

In the last 20 years, increasingly rigorous graduation requirements and performance standards have turned the spotlight on accountability and those who lead. One result is that school boards are being called upon to take responsibility for creating the conditions under which excellent teaching and learning can take place, and to be accountable for doing so. This means reporting to state authorities and to the community about how well students are doing and what actions are being taken to address perceived deficiencies. It also means taking steps through governance to ensure that commitments to the state and community are kept.

Accountability is not unique to schools; other organizations have their own accountability imperatives. In business, it is the bottom line. In manufacturing, it is the quantity and quality of production. In the public sector, it is how well services are being provided. In education, it is student achievement.

Effective school boards take accountability very seriously, and they dedicate themselves to being responsible stewards and leaders of public education. They address the critics of public education with solid performance results and take steps to correct deficiencies.

Alignment

Alignment is another key component of a systems approach to school board leadership. A critical role of the board is to establish quality standards and system priorities focused on enhancing student achievement. But if the work of the board stops there, it will not be enough. The board is responsible to create the conditions under which excellent teaching and student performance will take place.

Effective system leaders understand that standards will not be met nor priorities achieved unless the needed resources and support are in place to get the job done. The next critical step is to align the organization by harnessing the system's resources to the achievement of the system's standards and priorities. Without deliberate attention to alignment issues, the system is highly susceptible to organizational drift.

Alignment begins with the budget-setting process, but it does not stop there. The school system's budget, approved and adopted by the board, is the key instrument a board has to ensure alignment. Effective boards ask many questions during the budget-setting process, but they also establish in advance expectations for the allocation of scarce resources. If the board has decided that improving reading performance in the early years is a priority, it must make sure that sufficient resources are provided for the staff to achieve that priority. Sometimes it means eliminating programs and initiatives that are less important or have not lived up to expectation; sometimes it means convincing the community or other funding agency that additional resources are critically needed.

Alignment, though, is not confined to resources. Some of the most important aspects of real alignment have less to do with resources and much more to do with mental models, established ways of thinking and acting that get in the way of real progress. For example, the board may believe and espouse that all students can learn complex mathematical concepts; but if only 45 percent of students take mathematics courses beyond Algebra I, the system is not aligned. The board must play a pivotal role in examining prevailing practices and challenging those that do not support progress toward system goals. This means asking the right questions, requiring data in usable formats, and challenging prevailing aspects of the school system's culture and operating norms.

Climate and Culture

Climate is an essential aspect of system culture. Terrance Deal describes culture as "the way we do things around here." Climate is a by-product of culture and is dependent on it. Leading-edge organizations are very conscious of climate because of its powerful effect on behavior. In one such organization, a bell rings every time a major initiative experiences a problem. The ringing of the bell reminds everyone that taking risks is fundamental to creating new products and more effective ways of operating. What is celebrated is not the failure but the human spirit of adventure. In such a climate, individuals are empowered to act boldly and think outside the box.

Effective school boards give priority attention to climate as well, because it factors importantly in what students and teachers are able to accomplish. Climate also is a critical determinant of how parents and others in the community view schools. For example, if the principal and faculty of a school believe that parents should be seen but not heard, parents who express concerns, make suggestions for improvement, or question their child's progress will be viewed with suspicion. They may be labeled as troublemakers and their voices discounted. In fact, in too many schools, parents are told

implicitly and sometimes explicitly that school matters belong to the professionals and that the role of parents is to make sure their children are in school and doing what they are asked to do.

The problem with that way of thinking is that it alienates parents and others. Many recall only the bad experiences their children had in school and the frustration they felt when their efforts to address problems were met with what they perceived as stonewalling and inaction. When schools are subsequently criticized, these parents frequently join the chorus of critics. School boards need to pay attention to climate and culture and take steps to ensure that the values espoused by the school system are in fact driving and shaping the climate of schools. Most school systems say that they value parents as partners, but the climate of individual schools does not always reflect that value. School systems often proclaim that all children can be successful learners, but the climate of schools can give some children a very different, less inclusive impression. When that happens, students' feelings of competence and self-worth suffer, and with them, their ability to perform.

"School boards that understand the powerful effect that climate has on the behavior and performance of teachers and students...pay attention to the human dimension of the organization."

School boards that understand the powerful effect that climate has on the behavior and performance of teachers and students, as well as on the perceptions of the community, pay attention to the human dimension of the organization. They articulate values such as respect for others, civility, integrity, and inclusion. And they model the behavior they expect from others.

Collaborative Relationships

Relationships are an important dimension in effective organizations. That is one reason why students who graduate from high school today need to be skillful in working with others in team situations. Not too many years ago, the dominant metaphor of success for most Americans was competition. We expressed that metaphor in many ways: "to the victor belong the spoils"; "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing"; "if you can't break a record, make the person in front of you do so"; "paddle your own canoe"; "survival of the fittest." Today, the metaphor has been given a new twist. Competition is still important, but it is not competition among individuals that is emphasized, but competition among teams. We know that when individuals work together effectively, the product of their efforts will almost always be superior to the efforts of any single individual. It is a principle we have known for some time: Most breakthrough research is the product of team effort, not individual performance. The same can be said for successful basketball and football teams. What set Michael Jordan apart from most basketball players was not only his incredible physical talents but also his unselfishness on the court—feeding the ball to someone else for the basket, rather than setting himself up to take the shot.

In the Information Age, relationships are not just important, they are critical. The quality of relationships in an organization will largely determine how well that organization produces. Helping to create the conditions that make it possible for teachers to teach well and students to perform excellently is one of the critical challenges of school boards. That means boards must have an accurate gauge of the quality of relationships. In addition, they must be prepared to take affirmative action to promote better relationships where immediate improvement is needed. Finally, they must commit to fostering long-term collaborative relationships, inside and outside the school system.

School boards should also strive to collaborate with the business and political leaders in the community. These leaders sometimes are perceived as being disinterested in school governance issues or as resisting schools' efforts because of the possible financial or political implications of board actions. But many successful school boards have demonstrated that establishing positive, outreaching relationships with these highly relevant community constituents creates productive partnerships for student success as well as an increase in willingness to make political and financial decisions favorable to enabling successful schools.

Collaboration occurs when people come together and contribute to the solution to a problem or to the creation of new and better ways of achieving desired results. Collaboration

is based on trust and mutual respect. It can be encouraged, but it cannot be legislated. Collaboration means paying attention to the conditions under which students and teachers work and seeking practical ways to improve those conditions. Working conditions are important, but even more important is the way people are treated in schools and by schools. Collaboration also means taking the initiative to keep political leaders informed about school successes and shortcomings, and it means giving them the recognition they deserve when they act in ways that are supportive of the schools system's vision for student achievement. It means earnestly seeking advice from business leaders about what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in the workplace. It also means seeking advice and review of school system business and financial management practices in order to promote greater efficiencies. Boards that understand systems thinking know that promoting collaboration and cooperation requires bringing teachers, parents, students, and community members into the decision-making process. It is hard work, but it is important work. It is work that boards must be willing to do if improving student achievement is the goal. The network of collaboration must include the business community, higher education, community leaders, and all those who have a stake in promoting excellent public schools.

micromanage but to promote improved practices. The questions are not hostile but affirming. They are the means by which the board can encourage the superintendent and staff to develop the habit of continuously seeking ways to improve existing operations and results.

Finally, effective organizations adopt a customer focus. For many educators, the notion of "customer" applied to students, parents, and others is alien and offensive. It has an air of commercialism about it that is contrary to the educators' worldview. In this context, however, adopting a customer focus means understanding what we do and for whom.

W. Edwards Deming, one of the architects of quality management, teaches that everyone in the organization is a customer—and has customers. (For extensive information on Deming's ideas, see the Web site ***http://www.deming.org***.) The central question for each individual is this: Whom do I serve and who serves me? Answering this question brings focus and purpose to the work we do.

In school systems, lots of people are doing lots of things, carrying out endless daily routines, often without ever consciously considering how what they do can and does contribute to achieving the district's mission and goals. Bus drivers need to understand, for example, that merely transporting students is not their job; the real challenge is to transport them in such a way that they arrive at school ready to learn, not frustrated and anxious. The third-grade teacher serves the fourth-grade teacher by preparing her students to be successful in the next grade, and so forth.

"Continuous improvement is perhaps the single orientation that most clearly defines the effective modern organization."

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is perhaps the single orientation that most clearly defines the effective modern organization. Continuous improvement is about paying attention to the quality of what we do. As one continuous improvement advocate expressed it, the goal is not to be 10 percent better in any one area of the operation; it is to be 1 percent better in ten areas of the operation. The Japanese have a word for continuous improvement: kaizen. It means taking whatever the product or process is and making it better. It is a way of thinking and acting that is never satisfied with the status quo; it is an objective that is never accomplished.

Boards that believe in continuous improvement ask probing questions about existing practices, not to

What is true for bus drivers and classroom teachers is even truer for school district leaders. School boards must learn to be customer-focused, to understand whom they serve and who serves them. Doing so builds collaborative relationships and fosters a climate where high achievement is fostered and valued.

In the chapters that follow, each of these key concepts will be explored in greater depth with examples and suggested strategies that boards can use to bring systems thinking into their own school districts.

chapter 2 Vision

Your vision is what you want to become—the ideal tomorrow you want to create today. The more clearly you can see your vision and describe it to others, the more compelling it becomes. An explicit vision directs and shapes an organization. Vision, values, mission, purpose, and goals are all components that convey the shared core beliefs of the organization. The organization itself has no vision; rather, the people in the organization determine a shared vision. Developing a shared vision for student achievement that reflects the common values and core beliefs of a school district is the starting point for school boards that want to focus on student achievement. This shared vision is the kernel of the mission and goals that not only direct the board's actions but also gain the commitment of the entire community to improving achievement for all students. Engaging the entire community in creating the vision generates support for the resources necessary to make the vision a reality.

Building a Shared Vision

Building a shared vision requires that you first are able to agree on your core values and beliefs. Knowing what you really value individually and collectively guides your aspirations and your mission as a district.

Your vision should inspire. The process for determining your vision is like discovering your destiny. For school districts, that destiny must lie in improving achievement for all students. A vision with anything less than student achievement as the top priority cannot fulfill the original mission of public education.

Most importantly, your vision cannot end with the written statement. Organizations that complete the writing process and believe that they have a vision are mistaken. Writing is only the beginning. Moving the vision from paper into practice is the challenge. The vision takes form in the day-to-day actions of everyone in the organization. In a school district, "everyone" includes both the employees and the other stakeholders—parents, community advocates, business, government agencies, and higher education. Engaging the total community makes the vision more likely to be achieved. The school board's responsibility is to work with the community to develop student achievement as the top priority. And making it the top community priority will help you ensure that it becomes a reality because it will garner the necessary financial resources and human energy.

To achieve such total commitment, the board must take multiple steps. First, you must have a process for gathering input from the stakeholders in order to identify their core beliefs and common values. Once those values are delineated, you need a process for drafting a vision statement. After the draft statement is written, you must test the vision. Seek feedback from the stakeholders to ensure that the core beliefs are reflected in the statement and that the vision inspires commitment to student achievement as the highest priority. When the vision statement is complete, the dissemination process begins.

Communication of the vision to the entire community is essential. It is important that you as board members can articulate the key points of the vision. You should repeat these essential points at every opportunity when you are together and when you are out in the community. By constantly repeating and embracing these key components, you will develop the constancy of purpose needed to sustain your vision. This constancy of purpose will guide your leadership.

Try the self-assessment in the next section to help determine whether your board already has processes in place to work through each of these stages and is ready to build its vision. Perhaps your visioning process is already complete and you are ready to proceed to the framework for implementing your vision. If so, move to Chapter 3, on standards, or to a Key Action chapter that reflects a more immediate challenge for your district. If, on the other hand, you would like to know more about building a shared vision, consult your state school boards association. Your state association can provide these services or can offer guidance on various consultants and the quality of their work. Also consider whether you may have staff within the district who can use or modify the strategies provided by your state association and serve as facilitators for the process. State associations often can provide strategies intended for those who do not wish to turn the process over to an external resource.

In addition to a self-assessment, the following pages contain other resources to board members in the visioning process:

1. Questions that could provide the basis for dialogue among board members and between the board and the superintendent.
2. Differentiated responsibilities of the board and the superintendent in the vision-setting process.
3. Considerations student achievement planning teams can make as they develop an action plan to jump-start the comprehensive student achievement planning process in their districts.
4. Resources that can be used to help in the process of visioning.
5. A profile of a school district that has been successful in community engagement in its visioning and strategic planning.

Each succeeding chapter contains a similar list of tools and resources for board members and the planning team to use.

Vision Self-Assessment

Use this tool to assess your initial understanding of vision and also to get a sense of where you are as a board on this key action. Indicate the degree to which your board/district has achieved the following elements for establishing a vision for improving student achievement.

	Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Beginning to Achieve
Our board has established a written vision that commits to student achievement as the top priority of the school board, staff, and community.				
Stakeholder representatives (school board, senior leadership, district staff, school staff, employee organizations, parents, community advocates, higher education, business leaders, and students) helped create the vision.				
As a board we have discussed the core beliefs and values of our school district and community, and these values are reflected in our vision.				
Our vision is clearly articulated and known to all stakeholders in the community.				
We frequently revisit and reaffirm our vision to ensure our constancy of purpose.				
Our vision is the basis for all long-range, strategic planning and policy decisions.				
Our vision is the guiding force that sets the framework for how we operate as a district.				
We base our resource and budget decisions on our vision. Everything we do as a board of education aligns to achieve our vision.				

Vision Questions the School Board Should Ask Itself:

- Does the school board play a central role in fostering and guiding community dialogue about the vision for its schools?
- Is community broadly defined—staff, parents, students, service organizations, school site councils, union representatives, higher education, business, and so on?
- Do the district's vision and mission reflect the student achievement expectations and needs of the community?
- Do the school board and superintendent act as a team to communicate the vision and make it a reality?
- Is there a strategic plan to implement the vision?
- Does strategic planning focus on student achievement, and is the community engaged in planning processes?
- What policies need to be in place to support strategic plan initiatives?
- How do we continuously assure our vision is future-focused?

Vision Questions the School Board Should Ask the Superintendent and Staff:

- Have specific plans been developed to engage the community in the vision and strategic planning processes, and how do the plans ensure that participants are representative of the community?
- What are the district's student achievement strengths and weaknesses? How do students compare to students in other districts? Where does the vision need to take us?
- How do the short- and long-term goals of the strategic plan promote student achievement?
- How are school improvement plans integrated with district strategic plans?
- What strategies will be used to improve achievement and how were they selected—best practices and research based?
- What indicators are used to measure progress at the district and school level?

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in the Vision and Planning Process	
The school board	The superintendent
1. Approves a strategic planning process to include stakeholders in creating the vision for student achievement.	1a. Recommends a visionary strategic planning process to the board that incorporates participation by a broad base of stakeholders. 1b. Ensures the integrity of the planning process. 1c. Ensures staff development to carry out the planning process. 1d. Ensures that the recommendations of the strategic planning team are presented to the board for action. 1e. Coordinates periodic review of the strategic plan.
2. Adopts the vision.	2a. Ensures that short- and long-range plans related to the vision are developed and carried out both at the district and at the school level. 2b. Develops performance indicators based on data to measure progress toward the vision for student achievement. 2c. Conducts work sessions with the board to increase its understanding of progress needed to move from current status to the vision for student achievement. 2d. Recommends performance indicators for board action.
3. Adopts board goals that support the vision.	3a. Works with the board to identify its role in supporting the vision. 3b. Works with the board to develop plans for carrying out its goals.
4. Communicates the vision.	4a. Communicates, through the district's communication plan, the vision to the staff and community in a team approach that incorporates board participation. 4b. Prepares and disseminates information about progress toward the vision.
5. Keeps vision at the forefront of all decision making.	5a. Uses the vision to guide priority recommendations to the board. 5b. Uses the vision to guide decisions throughout the organization.
6. Adopts policies needed to achieve the vision.	6a. Recommends policies needed to support the vision. 6b. Conducts periodic review with the board to identify additional policies or revise existing ones.
7. Allocates resources based on the vision.	7a. Recommends resources needed to support the vision through the budgeting process. 7b. Conducts periodic review with the board to identify resources and funding needed.
8. Monitors progress toward vision periodically.	8a. Brings data to the board periodically that enable the board to review progress in student achievement. 8b. Recommends changes based on data.

Planning Team Considerations for Developing a Plan for a Vision

1. How will we:
   - Identify and choose someone as a resource to lead our board, staff, and community through the vision-setting process?
   - Determine where we are as a district at the start of the process?
   - Ensure that the vision-setting process includes involvement of all stakeholders in our district?
   - Ensure that our core values are articulated and reflected in the vision and mission?
   - Identify key stakeholders in our community who must be involved in the process from the beginning?
   - Set a timetable for completion of initial tasks?
   - Set a target date for completion of the entire vision-setting process?
2. How can we create a process that will let us see the future of education in our district through the eyes of many different stakeholders?

Resources for Developing a Vision

Barth, Roland S. "Coming to a Vision." *Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 1993, vol. 14, no. 1. Pp. 6-11.

Discusses the value of a school vision statement and the numerous ways in which vision statements may come about.

Bailey, Gerald D. and David C. Thompson. "School Board Goal Setting: A Six-Step Approach." *ERS Spectrum*, vol. 7, no. 1, Winter 1989, pp. 30-33.

Outlines the purposes of school board goals in articulating a clear school mission and proposes a simple six-step school board goal-setting model.

Chance, Edward W. *et al.* "Collaborative Vision Building: A Case Study of Two Districts." October 1994. Full text at *http://tel.occe.ou.edu/vision.html*

Describes the collaborative process of vision building in two small school districts. Vision statements were developed in the context of a school/community partnership.

"How to Establish Clear Academic Expectations." *NASSP Tips for Principals*, December 1997. 2 pp. (National Association for Secondary School Principals)

Presents a summary of guidelines to help educational leaders establish academic expectations for their school and integrate them into the school's culture.

Lashway, Larry. "Visionary Leadership." ERIC Digest 110, January 1997. ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. Full text at *http://eric.uoregon.edu/publications/digests/digest110.html*

Tewel, Kenneth J. "Navigate with Vision." *The Executive Educator*, April 1996. pp. 16-19.

Crafting a vision and belief statement is just the beginning of the process of restructuring. The district's vision and beliefs must be incorporated into the district's goals, strategies, policies, processes, cultural practices, management behavior, and accountability systems—in short, into everything the district does.

A Profile of Community Engagement in Vision

El Centro, California

El Centro Elementary School District is in the southeast corner of California, 12 miles from the Mexican border. The school district made a commitment, in collaboration with key stakeholders in the community, to make substantial and continuous improvements in its schools.

In the summer of 1994, the El Centro School District began a strategic planning process, in conjunction with Goals 2000, that had the following objectives:

- To build consensus around the district's mission, goals, and values
- To develop strategies to improve student performance
- To create a process that involves all stakeholders
- To establish a framework for ongoing long-range planning that incorporates existing planning initiatives and new concepts as they are developed

As the first step, the El Centro board of trustees discussed strategic issues that pertained to the school district and its students. After these discussions, the board drafted a mission statement, a vision statement, three goals, and eight principles that were identified as critical to support the three goals.

That fall, the district published an open letter to the community, pledging a commitment to improve the educational process for all students. The open letter shared the core beliefs that had influenced the board's formulation of its mission and vision statements and its goals and principles. The letter also invited staff, parents, and the community to participate in a series of community forums. At these forums, stakeholders could react to these fundamental beliefs and goals and discuss the obstacles and barriers they perceived as standing in the way of the district's ability to achieve its goals.

School principals, who also received the letter, were asked to hold faculty meetings at which all certificated and classified staff could discuss the same issues. Finally, leaders of local service clubs, professional organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, and members of an alliance of religious leaders were invited either to participate in a community forum or to schedule a similar activity for their constituents.

During that fall and in spring 1995, 27 community forums, faculty meetings, and activities with service clubs, religious leaders, and professional organizations were held. All community forums were conducted in English and Spanish; one meeting was held during the day at a laundromat in order to include many parents who typically did not participate. More than 1,200 people participated in the process of reacting to the draft mission, vision, goals, and principles, and then identifying and putting into priority order the obstacles that had to be removed in order for the district to meet its goals of literacy, a strong academic program, and good citizenship.

District leaders say the forums maximized participation for all stakeholders. Led by the district's senior administrative staff and monitored by the board of trustees, each forum followed an identical format. After a welcome and introductions, staff presented the goals to achieve and the principles to follow. Participants were arranged in small groups of six to eight members; each group, equipped with paper, pens, and tape, selected a reporter and a recorder. The group first reacted to the district's presentation, charting, posting, and reporting its views. Then the groups tackled the other major issue: "What obstacles or barriers stand in the way of the district's achieving these three goals?" After brainstorming and charting its perceptions, each group listed, in priority order, the top five obstacles it perceived.

"One meeting was held during the day at a laundromat in order to include many parents who typically did not participate."

Participants identified more than 600 barriers that needed to be overcome. Senior district staff reviewed the list and grouped the obstacles into six categories: accountability, communication, instruction, parents and community, policy/fiscal, and safety. After consolidating responses by frequency, the district identified the forum participants' top 10 priorities:

- Improvement in communication between home, school, teacher, district
- Student uniforms
- Better discipline to deal with classroom disruptions

- Standards for what students are expected to learn
- More parental involvement
- Greater community and business support
- More parent education
- Accountability from students, parents, teachers, and administrators
- More resources
- Teacher attitudes, perceptions, and expectations

Armed with this list, the district then began a process to determine the most effective ways to remove these barriers. Each school was asked to submit the names of classified and certificated employees and parents to begin to develop an action plan. Members of the community at large and business persons were also invited to participate on school leadership teams and on the districtwide panel.

The 76-member panel, divided into six working groups—one for each major category—met six times during the 1994-95 school year. The panel created a recommended plan of action by using a "backward mapping" process that began with the major question, "Where do we want to be?" and worked backward to figure out how to get there. Each working group determined the tasks, time, talent, and resources needed to arrive at the destination. Each group shared its draft plan with the entire panel and sought information, clarification, and recommendations.

The El Centro board of trustees reviewed and adopted the plan in June 1995. That action plan evolved into the district's strategic plan, "Goals to Achieve—Principles to Follow." The major components of the plan are evaluated every year and revised accordingly, says Superintendent Michael Klentschy. Parents, teachers, administrators, and community and business representatives hold meetings to review the strategic plan and report to the board every year, and a community meeting is held every five years.

The districtwide panel met twice during the next three school years to review and recommend an updated course of action for the district and to review district and individual school progress in achieving the objectives. Two additional categories —facilities and technology—were added at the end of the 1996-97 school year, and the panel then divided into eight teams to study the issues and make recommendations. The draft plan of action for each group became the framework for program planning and program delivery both at the district level and at the school site level. Each plan provides the means to link various levels of planning.

The district is making steady progress in meeting its goals. During the 1995-96 school year, for example, each school's leadership team, staff, and site council participated in developing the criteria to determine the level of student accomplishment necessary to meet grade-level performance objectives. In 1997-98, 53 percent of students met district performance criteria in reading, and 61 percent met the criteria in mathematics, for a total of 57 percent meeting criteria in both areas. For 1998-99, the district—which is seeking steady, incremental increases—targeted a 4 percent total increase in the percentage of students meeting performance criteria.

The El Centro district knows it still has a long way to go. "With the collaboration of teachers, support staff, principals, parents, the business community, and others, we are making changes in the El Centro School District so we can place a sharper focus on our customer, the student," school leaders say in their Web site.

Overall, says Superintendent Klentschy, the district's most noticeable achievement is its engagement with the community as a "true partner." Parents are more involved in the schools, and parent workshops and institutes have empowered parents to help their children. Teachers are more engaged in using different strategies to put students over the bar. The number of interventions, such as tutoring and after-school programs for math, reading, and writing improvement, has increased. And the district is receiving more support from business. Thirty-three businesses have adopted schools; one company, Costco, received an award for having 30 employees adopt students and spent two hours a week tutoring and mentoring them.

School Board President Dianna Newton says that "open and honest communication with the public," continuity and feedback from participants are important components in sustaining public engagement. Based on his experiences, Klentschy suggests that school districts embarking on a public engagement process should listen to but should not react to the public's perception of the status of their schools. "Truly engage the public in carefully planned activities designed to find incremental solutions and results, which are frequently reported," he says.

For more information, contact Michael Klentschy, superintendent, at (760) 352-5712, ext. 515. The district's Web site is *http://www.ecsd.k12.ca.us.*

This profile is excerpted from *The Community Connection: Case Studies in Public Engagement*, by Anne Wright and Judith Brody Saks. Published by the National School Boards Association, 2000.

chapter 3
Standards

Standards are a part of everyday life. They come in many forms. Among the most familiar are athletic standards, such as qualifying times required to compete in a race. Most manufacturers have standards for their products and inspectors who are responsible for preventing inferior products.

In education, standards form the foundation for a school district's learning system. They give a common focus to classroom instruction, assessments, and resource use. Standards help teachers and principals set priorities for use of instructional time. Standards provide a measure for identifying students who need extra or different instructional support in order to succeed. Standards establish consistent expectations so that all children are challenged and receive a quality education.

How Do We Set the Quality Mark?

We must be able to explain what we expect each child to know and be able to do at each grade level. That is, we must describe the specific content and skills that the student is expected to demonstrate. This is the "what" of standards. There is a second part to defining student performance. We must also be able to determine the proficiency level we expect a student to meet. In other words, "how well" do we expect the student to be able to perform in order to meet the standards? These expectations should be stated in simple terms with no educational jargon. The standards are not only for educators but also for parents, community, and students. They set the target for everyone.

How Do We Ensure that the Target Is the Right One?

- **The target must be reasonable.**

  Reaching for the stars is one thing; branding as failures all who cannot touch the stars is quite another. We all want to raise the bar, but setting it at a height that is unattainable will create frustration and defeat. Adults sometimes forget what it was like to be a third-grader. They may have an inflated view of what they actually knew and were able to do at that time of their life. Standard-setting decisions need to be based on sound educational research and knowledge of what is developmentally appropriate performance at each age and stage of development. This is where the professional educators must assume primary responsibility.

  School boards should resist setting very high standards for bragging rights. While this approach may be politically popular in some states and districts, it is counterproductive for students and teachers. In fact, few politicians who vote to set educational standards ever attempt to test themselves on the measures. School board members should consider taking the actual student assessments in an informal setting. Such an activity can help build understanding of what we are asking children to know and be able to do. It also can serve as quite a reality check.

- **The target must challenge the student.**

  Just as we can err on the side of setting standards too high, we can also end up setting such minimal standards that they become meaningless. To use another athletic analogy, if the high-jump bar is set only a few inches above the ground, all can meet the standard but few will actually have to push themselves to complete the jump.

  A tendency to set minimal standards is more common with schools and districts that serve a large number of needy students. Educators and local boards may not have sufficiently high expectations for student performance in these communities. They may underestimate student potential, and these lower expectations translate into lower standards. One result is that many students are not challenged and supported to achieve the academic rigor they will need to succeed in the competitive world they will enter. School boards must be aggressive in promoting equity and educational excellence for all students. Standards are an essential step.

- **The target must be clearly understood by all.**

  Student performance standards must be described in ways that parents, students, community, and staff all would recognize whether students do or do not reach the mark. Too often standards are not concrete and contain statements such as "learn to appreciate literature." What does this mean? How do you measure such a "standard"? What distinguishes those students who have achieved the standard from those who have not? Contrast this with a

standard such as, "Read 20 literary works from a selected list representing a variety of traditional and contemporary literature, including novels, folk tales, myths, stories, poems, and plays." Can a group of teachers establish such a list? Can a teacher determine who has met the standard? Can a student understand what is expected? That is not to say that there will be no debate over the list itself or what additional performances are essential beyond simply reading a specified number of books. There may even be debate over the appropriate number. But once the stakeholders resolve such issues, the progress of a student toward achieving the standard can be assessed and evaluated.

Well-developed standards include not only descriptions of the student performance that is expected but also examples of student work with evaluative comments. Such information provides clear guidance for teachers about how to spend instructional time, how to evaluate students' progress, and what feedback is needed for students to be successful. Parents also learn through concrete examples what the expectations are for their children. And, most important, students can see what is required of them.

- **Local standards should incorporate state and national standards.**

Many national organizations have developed standards and curricular guidelines for student performance. Virtually all states also have established their own standards for student performance. The degree of detail can vary greatly from state to state, and some states are farther along with their development than others. Local school boards should be sure that the state standards—whatever their status—are reflected in the district's standards.

It is essential that state and local standards be consistent. Local districts may want to expand their standards beyond state expectations. They may also want to provide more detailed definitions than their state standards. Both approaches can work well. What district leaders should avoid is setting local standards that are incongruous with those of the state or that are less demanding. Such incongruity will lead to confusion among staff and make it impossible to establish accountability for quality education.

How Do We Reach the Target?

No conversation should take place about setting the right target without an accompanying discussion about what is needed to reach the target. Too often leaders assume that their responsibility ends when the target standards are set. To the contrary, their responsibility has only begun. Leaders need to be prepared to consider quite seriously the consequences of setting student achievement standards.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, Systems Thinking, for every action there is a reaction. Setting challenging standards can result in increased student failures rather than increased student success if no consideration is given to ensuring that supports are in place for students who struggle to meet the new standards. What is the district prepared to commit to students who fail to reach the standards initially? What remedial supports will be made available to all students who need them? What interventions will be put into place early to avoid the need for remediation later? What alternative strategies need to be developed for students to meet the standards? What resources will need to be added or realigned to achieve the target?

None of these questions has an easy answer, but failure to ask the questions in the first place can be fatal to the ultimate goal of improving student achievement. The upcoming chapters on accountability and alignment explore possible answers to these questions. Understanding that these questions cannot be ignored is essential to understanding the impact of establishing standards as a key action.

The Need for Broad Public Support

School boards cannot establish a successful standards-based educational system without the support of all critical stakeholders. If teachers do not take ownership of the standards, they will not prepare their students to meet them. Parents who do not understand and support the standards cannot help their children meet expectations. If the community does not support the standards, it will not provide the resources necessary for schools to prepare students to meet them. Accountability is essential to maintaining public confidence, and accountability begins with shared understanding of desired results. Mutually agreed on standards define those expectations. They set consistent levels of performance for all students. Standards are the foundation of quality educational programs.

The self-assessment below can help you determine where your district needs to go regarding standards. It serves both as an assessment and as guidelines for quality standards. It is followed by questions board members can ask themselves and questions for the superintendent and staff. As in the previous chapter, the roles of board members and the superintendent are suggested. And the considerations that your planning team should make as it develops your team's "plan to plan" are included. The profile of a district using community engagement for standards and assessment is included in the next chapter.

Standards Self-Assessment

Use this tool to assess your initial understanding of standards and also to get a sense of where you are as a board on this key action. Indicate the degree to which your board/district has achieved the following elements for establishing standards for student achievement.

	Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Beginning to Achieve
Our district has established student performance standards that clearly define what students are supposed to know and be able to do at each grade level.				
Our local standards reflect external state and national standards for student performance.				
Staff and community have been involved in determining our standards.				
Our standards are published in a single document for distribution to the public.				
Our standards are written in a format that is easily understood by parents and the community.				
Our district has a plan for keeping these standards constantly in front of parents, students, and staff so that everyone knows what is expected.				
We have a process for reviewing and revising our district standards so that they remain current and viable.				

Standards Questions the School Board Should Ask Itself

- What have we done as a board to promote involvement of the community—including business, political, and higher education leaders—in setting standards for our students?
- How are standards clearly communicated to students, parents, teachers, and other members of the community?
- How do we help parents and community members understand that standards should address both what students should know and what they should be able to do at key points in their schooling?
- Is the rigor of our standards consistent with parent and community expectations?
- What can the board do to foster and sustain public support for standards?
- How do we determine what policy bases and resources are needed for the superintendent and staff to implement standards-based instruction?
- What is the connection between our local standards and the state standards?
- What policies does the board need to adopt to enable successful implementation of standards?

Standards Questions the School Board Should Ask the Superintendent and Staff

- Do our standards define both what students should know and what they should be able to do?
- Are our standards congruent with state standards?
- Are state standards used as benchmarks to compare and align district standards but not to limit them?
- Do teachers understand standards, and do they have the skills to prepare students to achieve them?
- What percentage of students meet standards, exceed them, or fail to attain them, and what are their demographics?
- What goals and objectives should be set for students, and do we have high expectations for all students?
- What is a realistic time line for the achievement of goals and objectives?
- What are the challenges to goals and objectives?
- How do we help parents know what they can do to help their children attain standards?
- Does success in meeting standards result in meaningful recognition for students, teachers, and schools?
- Does failure to meet standards have meaningful consequences for students, teachers and schools?
- What training and other resources does the staff need to successfully implement standards?

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in the Standards Process	
The school board	The superintendent
1. Approves standards for student learning.	1a. Recommends standards for student learning based on state standards. If no state standards exist, presents standards recommended by a credible external source or presents standards developed locally with input from key stakeholders. 1b. Leads discussion with the board on state standards and alignment where local standards also exist. 1c. Leads discussion with the board on whether a commitment exists to exceed state standards. 1d. Recommends changes to the board as needed.
2. Ensures that curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned with student achievement standards.	2a. Implements alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment with student achievement standards. 2b. Makes staffing and resource allocation decisions based on student achievement standards. 2c. Ensures professional development so that teachers incorporate student achievement standards into classroom instruction.
3. Adopts and revises policies to support standards.	3a. Recommends policies needed to support standards. 3b. Conducts periodic review with the board to identify additional policies or revise existing ones.
4. Participates in periodic work sessions to review student standards and the district's initiatives to help all students achieve.	4a. Provides the board with background and updates on district standards. 4b. Provides the board with data analyzing the district's efforts to have all students meet standards. 4c. Discusses and recommends changes to help students who are not meeting standards.
5. Ensures clear, jargon-free communications about standards that increase the awareness and understanding of parents, students and staff.	5a. Develops a comprehensive communication plan for standards that addresses information needs of parents, staff, students, and community. 5b. Prepares easy-to-understand materials targeted for various audiences. 5c. Develops talking points about standards to guide board members and staff in presenting and discussing standards with various audiences.
6. Encourages community support for standards.	6a. Develops materials specifically to help board members serve as advocates for standards within the community. 6b. Develops materials specifically to help school and district staff serve as advocates for standards within the community. 6c. Advocates support for standards publicly and privately.

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in the Standards Process (Continued)	
The school board	The superintendent
7. Allocates resources needed to increase the number of students meeting standards.	7a. Makes recommendations for budget, allocation of resources, professional development, and additional instructional materials and equipment based on data related to needs of students not meeting standards.
8. Ensures that instructional programs are evaluated for effectiveness in helping students meet standards.	8a. Evaluates instructional programs periodically for effectiveness in helping students meet standards. 8b. Sets benchmarks and performance indicators for progress over time. 8c. Collects data on progress toward benchmarks and performance indicators and reviews data periodically with board and with staff. 8d. Recommends additions or deletions to instructional programs based on periodic evaluations and implements approved changes.

Planning Team Considerations for Developing a Plan for Standards:

How can we develop a process that will help us accomplish the following:

- Determine what are the current standards, both formal and informal, in our district.
- Decide where we will begin the process if our district does not have standards in each subject for each grade level.
- Involve both the staff and the community in prioritizing the content and grade levels where standards are to be first established.
- Capitalize on the professional expertise of school system staff in defining standards in various subject areas.
- Develop a realistic time frame for extending standards development and implementation.
- Ensure that any standards we develop are congruent with state standards.
- Provide the resources that will be needed to develop meaningful standards.
- Build on standards work that already has been done by other districts and by national organizations.

Resources for Standards Development

Bryant, Anne L. "Standards and Testing: The Real Goal is to Improve Student Learning." *School Board News*, May 30, 2000, pp. 2, 4.

Discusses the confusing variety of standards and standardized testing issues. Full text at *http://www.nsba.org/sbn*.

Cross, Christopher T. "Standards and Local Control; Clarifying the School Board's Role." *American School Board Journal*, April 1999, pp. 54-55.

Local school boards have a clear role to play as a resource on standards for parents, the public, and teachers. Some examples of what they can do are: (1) ensure that the public has easy access to national standards by which they can measure local standards; (2) insist that local standards be written in plain language that speaks to what students must know and be able to do; (3) lobby state officials to do the same when it comes to statewide standards. The results of a national poll commissioned by the Council for Basic Education reveal that parents, and the public in general, want children to achieve high standards that are comparable to those in other parts of the nation. In the CBE poll, 77 percent of respondents said that standards are too low. Nearly three-fourths of those polled strongly agreed that schools in different parts of the country should have very similar rigorous standards. The public is saying that parents and teachers need a reference point against which to measure what is being taught. Publishing state or local standards is only a start. The public must also be able to compare those standards to the very best examples we have. Virtually every state and professional subject discipline group has published standards. These standards often lack common formats or terms. Getting access to all of them would be a major task for most parents. To be useful to parents and teachers, standards should be accessible, not spread across scores of documents. They should be easy to understand, not cast in educators' jargon. They should also provide clear benchmarks against which students' skills and knowledge can be measured throughout their education.

Doyle, Denis P. and Susan Pimentel. *Raising the Standard; An Eight-Step Action Guide for Schools and Communities*, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 1999. 190 pp. With an accompanying CD-ROM.

This book is directed to both the education professional and the interested layman. It describes the process and content of standards-driven education reform, including working with the community, developing content, conducting an academic analysis, reorganizing for change, developing accountability measures, developing new partnerships, and making continuous improvements. Highlights and summary information appear in the hard copy, while the full text is contained in an "electronic book," the accompanying CD-ROM. Hypertext links to the texts of selected state and local standards are also featured on the CD-ROM. *Raising the Standard* is coordinated with additional resources and discussions on Goal Line, the education reform online network. (*http://www.goalline.org*)

"ASCD Standards Tutorial." Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria VA. *(http://webserver2.ascd.org/tutorials/jchen/tutorial2.cfm?ID=3&TITLE=Standards)*

This powerpoint tutorial presents definitions of the different types of standards, background perspectives, FAQs, resources on standards available from ASCD, and articles for further study.

ACHIEVE Standards Database.
http://www.achieve.org/achieve/achievestart.nsf/pages/abtclr

This is a searchable database of state and international academic standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, organized by subject, state, grade level, skill area, and keyword. The database allows for sophisticated searches and side-by-side comparisons. For example, one can search a state's math standards for all references to algebra or geometry and then compare them with other states' and countries' standards. This database was developed by the state- and business-backed nonprofit group Achieve for use by policymakers, educators, parents, and others seeking to strengthen and align standards in their districts. The Achieve Web site also includes a glossary of terms related to standards and provides links to individual state action plans to raise student performance. Achieve provides technical assistance to states, business leaders, and districts as they develop and implement standards.

COUNCIL FOR BASIC EDUCATION services and information. Since 1993, the Council for Basic Education has worked across the country to assist states and districts in their efforts to set rigorous content and performance standards.

CBE's web site, *http://www.cbe.org/stserv.htm* contains a description of their program services for states, school districts, schools, and other organizations. It also features a section on FAQ's about standards and a list of selected articles about standards. *http://www.cbe.org/standard.htm*. CBE has produced a comprehensive kit of academic standards and supplementary materials called *Standards for Excellence in Education*. The standards developed by national professional academic organizations have been condensed and edited into a 300-page book that captures the essence of the core knowledge and skills expected of students. Accompanying the book is a series of charts, a set of booklets for teachers, parents, and principals, and a CD-ROM version of the book. The kit is sold by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) as a whole or by individual components.

chapter 4
Assessment

In education, assessment takes many forms. It occurs at the classroom, school, district, state, and national levels. The most common kind of assessment occurs in classrooms in the form of teacher-made tests. Some local school districts have developed testing programs that help them assess students' progress toward meeting district standards and goals. Many states have developed some kind of state-level testing program. For the most part, these programs amount to achievement tests designed to measure student progress on state-devised learning standards. Other states require all districts to administer standardized tests, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Education Statistics, part of the U.S. Department of Education. It samples the academic performance of fourth-, eighth-, and 12-graders nationwide in a range of subjects.

Testing programs can seem very confusing to the average parent or community member. Complicated terminology and statistics can become the focus of discussion rather than the content or purpose of the tests themselves. What are the basic components of a sound assessment infrastructure that school board members should understand and promote?

1. **Multiple assessments are used to determine student progress.**

Some states and districts use a single high-stakes test given at certain points in the student's educational experience. These test results are used to determine everything from student eligibility for graduation to school effectiveness. While such a testing program may be easy to administer, it also can be misleading. There is no one perfect test that produces all the information needed to measure student achievement or school quality.

Some tests measure knowledge only. They determine what facts the student has learned (or at least memorized) at that point in time. These tests can vary widely in degree of difficulty. Just like the questions on television quiz shows, the questions on these tests can run the gamut from minimal common knowledge to obscure facts known by a few experts. Other tests are designed to measure skills. That is, they determine the student's capacity to apply process skills as well as knowledge to solve problems and communicate. These process tests (or performance assessments, as they are often called) also can have varying degrees of difficulty. Some require only basic understanding and skill acquisition for successful performance of the task. Others demand higher-order thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis in order to solve the problems posed. The challenge for school districts is to determine the right fit when selecting assessments for measuring student achievement.

2. **The assessment program is aligned with the academic standards.**

Such alignment may seem simplistic and obvious, but it is not at all uncommon for school district testing programs to lack coherence with the curriculum. The most glaring inconsistencies occur when the staff develops a set of academic standards, and the district uses standardized tests developed by external test publishing companies that measure other knowledge or skills. Students, teachers, and principals get caught in the resulting cross fire: Do we teach the district program or do we teach the test? Schools should never have to make that choice. There should be clear understanding of what students are expected to learn and confidence that the assessments used will measure those same learning objectives. When a student takes a test, there should be no surprises. Assessment should not be a game of "gotcha!" The purpose of a well-designed assessment program is to determine whether the district's program is being taught and learned in the classrooms by individual students.

3. **Assessments are conducted annually.**

Many states and districts administer systemwide testing only at certain grades such as three, five, and eight or four, eight, and 12. This type of "dipstick" testing does not provide the information school boards need to improve student achievement. The intervals between testing are too great. Much more has been taught than can possibly be assessed on a single test. With such wide intervals between testing, it is difficult to determine precisely where learning gaps have occurred. Any attempt to establish viable accountability for student achievement under such conditions is almost impossible. More important, infrequent testing fails to identify students who need intervention and support in order to be successful. Such tests end up labeling students as failures

rather than signaling a need for help.

4. Local district assessment programs complement state assessment programs.

More and more states are mandating statewide testing. These tests may be developed individually by the state on the basis of established learning standards. Other states designate a standardized test from a national test publisher as required testing for all districts. Local districts need to review carefully the test requirements at the state level. You cannot simply ignore state mandates and "do your own thing" even if you believe your measures are better than those used by the state. This will create inconsistency between what is taught and what is tested. State testing is required, and district results are compared. If your district does not include the state standards and incorporate their testing within your own, your results will suffer in comparison with results in districts that follow state guidelines. This may lead to a loss in public confidence and support for your district. At the same time, however, you need not simply accept state-mandated testing as the only measure of student progress. Your district's standards may exceed those established by the state. If you administer only the state's tests, you cannot be sure that the additional learning standards set by your district are actually being taught. The better course of action is to design the district's testing programs to complement those of the state.

"School boards cannot assume that if they give students the right tests, learning will follow automatically. ... To actually improve performance requires more than keeping score."

5. Classroom assessment programs complement district assessment programs.

Just as it is important to have district assessment programs that complement state assessment programs, it is also important to have classroom assessments that complement the district program. Teacher-made tests should prepare students for district assessments and for the high-stakes state assessments. This requires that teachers are knowledgeable about the district assessment programs not only in terms of content but also in terms of format. Acquiring such knowledge may necessitate additional training of staff, but such an investment pays off tremendously for students. Another investment that pays off well for districts is the creation of a test item bank. Teachers can use items directly from the test bank to create their classroom assessments. They can also use the item bank for examples of the types of questions and assessments they can construct themselves.

6. School board members are familiar with the basic types of tests and their formats.

Tests serve different purposes and take on different forms. The terminology can be very confusing to people not trained in educational assessment. It is not necessary to understand all of the specifics in detail in order to make good policy decisions. There are, however, some basic categories of assessment that school board members should understand. Frequently testing programs use one format for K-8 and a different format for high school. The major difference is that K-8 assessment is done by grade level, while high school assessment is based on individual course examinations. Let's look at the three common types of assessment: norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, and performance tests.

- **Norm-referenced tests.**

  Norm-referenced tests compare students, one against another. The most familiar format is the standardized norm-referenced test. These tests are developed by a variety of nationwide testing companies. A few of the most widely used are the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT); the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS); the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT); the California Achievement Test (CAT); and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS).

  Norm-referenced tests are first given to a large, nationwide sample of students. The "norm" of the test is the middle score over the entire range of score samples. This norm is referred to as the 50th percentile. It is essential for policymakers to understand that this technique guarantees that half of the students are always below the norm—that is, "below average." The advantage of including some form of norm-referenced testing in a comprehensive assessment program is that it provides an external anchor for comparing student, school, and district performance. The disadvantages to relying exclusively on

norm-referenced testing are that it may not match the learning standards established by the district and that results are based on comparing student performance to the performance of other students rather than to a standard.

- **Criterion-referenced tests.**

Criterion-referenced tests compare students against a well-defined standard of performance. The effectiveness of this type of assessment is directly related to the clarity of the performance standard. The assessments must match the performance standards. Doing so is not the same thing as simply setting a minimal "cut score" on a given test. Some districts and states have minimal competency levels for certification or graduation requirements. They may contend that they are using a criterion-referenced test but, in fact, they are simply setting minimal scores on a selected test. School boards need to know the difference.

Criterion-referenced tests are frequently developed at the local level to measure student progress on district standards. The advantage of these tests is that they can provide a direct match with the district's standards. Another advantage of criterion-referenced tests over norm-referenced tests is that they can be used to evaluate programs and district initiatives. Not all districts have the capacity to develop comprehensive criterion-referenced assessment programs, however. Consideration could be given to sharing resources with other districts to collaborate on assessment. Another approach is to begin with an existing test that is most closely aligned with local standards and then develop supplemental assessments over time to achieve the desired assessment match.

- **Performance-based tests.**

Performance assessments, as the name implies, require the student to "perform"; that is, students must demonstrate what they can do. Examples of this type of assessment include mathematical computations, problem solving, writing tasks, carrying out science experiments, producing an artistic work, and, in each instance, explaining the work. Collections of such work, referred to as portfolios, are often maintained to demonstrate progress over time.

Performance assessments are more time consuming and more complicated to score than are norm-referenced or criterion-referenced tests. They do, however, provide a more complete picture of students' capacities to understand and apply the content and skills that they have learned. Teachers who use performance assessment as an ongoing process and provide feedback to students can significantly improve student performance.

The greatest difficulty in using performance testing is that the rating of performance may not be consistent from one teacher to another. To use performance-based assessment effectively, a district must invest heavily in teacher training not only for delivery of instruction but also for determining student proficiency. There must be agreement on what is expected.

7. Assessment is necessary but not sufficient for quality assurance.

School boards cannot assume that if they give students the right tests, learning will follow automatically. Good assessments accurately measure and report student performance and progress. To actually improve performance, however, requires more than keeping score. Using the assessment results, giving quality feedback, and making changes based on that feedback are essential steps for improving student achievement. Such actions are the beginning of accountability, and a good beginning depends on quality assessment.

Assessment Self-Assessment

Use this tool to assess your initial understanding of assessment and also to get a sense of where you are as a board on this key action. Indicate the degree to which your board/district has the following elements for establishing an assessment program for improving student achievement

	Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Beginning to Achieve
We have an assessment program that is based on our district's student performance standards.				
Our assessment program has multiple measures rather than relying on a single high-stakes test.				
Our assessment program measures both knowledge and skills.				
Our assessment program measures more than minimal competency levels.				
District assessment is provided for all students annually.				
Classroom assessments developed by teachers are tied to the district's assessment priorities.				
Board members are familiar with the types of tests used in the district, including both content and format.				
Assessment data are provided to parents and students in a format that is easily understood.				
Assessment data are provided to teachers and principals in a format that can be used to make informed instructional decisions.				
A public report of the assessment data is provided annually to the community.				

Assessment Questions the School Board Should Ask Itself

- Have we provided the policy basis and the resources necessary for a quality assessment program in our district?
- How do we know whether or not our student assessments are aligned with state and district standards?
- How do we provide for community input into our assessment process?
- How do our assessments relate to our vision and student achievement goals?
- How do we know what our assessments measure?
- How do we know how our test results are benchmarked—compared to the state as a whole, to districts with similar demographics, to neighboring districts, and/or to our performance in previous years?
- What do assessments tell us about student performance and our short- and long-term goals? Does our assessment program tell us what our students know and what they can do?
- What assessment reports do we receive, and do we understand how to interpret them and use them in data-driven decision making?

Assessment Questions the School Board Should Ask the Superintendent and Staff

- At what intervals are assessments conducted? Are they conducted often enough to give teachers useful information for modifying instruction?
- Does our assessment program use multiple measures of student achievement—not infrequent, high-stakes testing?
- What subjects are covered in state and district assessments?
- What types of assessments are used—norm referenced, criterion referenced, performance based? What do these terms mean?
- Do tests require the use of a variety of skills—memorization, analysis, application, communication?
- Can assessment data provide information on individual students, classrooms, and schools?
- Do teachers, parents, and the community understand what our assessments measure and how they are used to inform instruction, curriculum, and district- and school-level plans?

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Assessment	
The school board	The superintendent
1. Participates in training to increase understanding of assessment. ▸ Concepts ▸ National and state assessments ▸ Relationship of assessment to standards	1. Holds work sessions with the board explaining all elements of a comprehensive assessment system.
2. Approves and periodically reviews/revises an assessment system for all students.	2a. Recommends to the board an assessment system that includes multiple assessment measures related to/aligned with standards and vision. 2b. Uses assessment measures to recommend modifications or changes in curriculum and instruction. 2c. Incorporates appropriate assessment measures as part of staff evaluations. 2d. Conducts periodic review of the assessment system with the board and recommends changes.
3. Ensures staff development on assessment measures.	3a. Ensures staff development on the district's assessment measures, including use of data and analysis of individual student performance. 3b. Ensures staff development on assessment measures using school and grade-level data.
4. Ensures effective, user-friendly communications on assessment measures and progress.	4. Builds understanding, through the district's communications plan, for assessment measures and how they are used to improve instruction.
5. Provides funding to support the assessment system.	5. Presents budget recommendations to the board on resources needed to implement and evaluate assessment measures.
6. Approves and monitors policies to ensure a strong assessment system.	6. Recommends to the board policies to support the district's assessment system.
7. Makes additions or changes to policies as needed.	7. Recommends additions or changes to policies as needed

Planning Team Considerations for Developing a Plan for Assessment

1. How will we gather the following information?
   - Determine what are the most commonly used measures of assessment in our district
   - Determine whether tests measure both knowledge and skills
   - Learn what tests are norm-referenced
   - Learn what criterion-referenced testing is done
   - Determine whether assessments are tied to district standards
   - Determine frequency of test administration
   - Learn how staff is trained to measure student progress
   - Determine whether our assessment infrastructure measures individual student proficiency as well as improvement
2. How will we involve teachers, parents, and community members in the process?
3. How will we work to align assessment, curriculum, and professional development to promote student achievement and the district's vision?
4. What can we do to ensure funding adequate to develop a quality assessment program?

Resources for Assessment

Barton, Paul E. "Too Much Testing of the Wrong Kind; Too Little of the Right Kind in K-12 Education." Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service Policy Information Center, 1999.

This report reviews the development of K-12 standardized testing, the emerging role of testing in the standards-based reform movement, school accountability, and other recent trends. Some promising testing practices are also discussed. Full text available at *http://www.ets.org/research/pic/testing/tmt.html*

CRESST: The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing. *http://www.cse.ucla.edu/*

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) conducts research on important topics related to K-12 educational testing. The CRESST Web site contains links to numerous reports, articles, and other resources on assessment.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation. *http://ericae.net*

This clearinghouse in the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system provides balanced information concerning educational assessment, evaluation, and research methodology. It provides links to carefully chosen resources in an attempt to encourage the responsible use of educational assessment data. Many of the books and articles in the online assessment library are available as full text. Also available is an online journal, *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*, which provides education professionals, policymakers, and other interested persons access to refereed articles chosen to have a positive impact on assessment, research, evaluation, and teaching practice, especially at the local education agency level.

Hoff, David J. "Testing's Ups and Downs Predictable." *Education Week*, January 26, 2000, pp. 1, 12-13.

Research shows that standardized test scores start low, rise quickly for a couple of years, level off for a few more, and then gradually drop over time. School districts are trying to institute programs that will keep test scores rising past the mark at which they usually start to slide. Full text is available at *http://www.edweek.com/ew/ew_printstory.cfm?slug=20cycle.h19*

Hurwitz, Nina and Sol Hurwitz. "Tests That Count: Do High-Stakes Assessments Really Improve Learning?" *American School Board Journal*, January 2000, pp. 21-25.

The growing popularity of high-stakes testing is creating a national debate over the fundamental question of whether it is possible to achieve both excellence and equity, and whether students can be prepared to meet the mark in high-stakes tests without sacrificing other valuable elements of their education. The success rate of some of the states and districts driving the movement are reviewed in this article, and guidelines are proposed for making high-stakes testing work. Full text is available at *http://www.asbj.com/2000/01/0100coverstory.html*.

Linn, Robert L. "Assessments and Accountability." *ER Online (Educational Researcher*, vol. 29 no. 2, pp. 4-14) *http://www.aera.net/pubs/er/arts/29-02/linn01.htm*.

Reviews the use of tests and assessments as key elements in five waves of educational reform during the past 50 years. These waves include the role of tests in tracking and selection emphasized in the 1950s, the use of tests for program accountability in the 1960s, minimum-competency testing programs of the 1970s, school and district accountability of the 1980s, and the standards-based accountability systems of the 1990s. Questions regarding the impact, validity, and generalizability of reported gains and the credibility of results in high-stakes accountability systems are discussed. Emphasis is given to three issues: (1) the role of content standards, (2) the dual goals of high performance standards and common standards for all students, and (3) the validity of accountability models. Some suggestions for dealing with the most severe limitations of accountability are provided.

Linn, Robert L. *A Policymaker's Guide to Standards-Led Assessment*. Jointly published by the Education Commission of the States and the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing. 1997. 27 pp. For sale by the Education Commission of the States, *http://www.ecs.org*.

Once you have standards in place, then what? How do standards-led assessments link what is taught to what is tested? This guide examines building consensus, ensuring accurate

measures, estimating costs, defining progress, addressing legal challenges, and building public support.

Matter, M. Kevin. "Strategies for Improving the Process of Educational Assessment." *Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Digest*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation, 1999. 2 pp.

Test administration is an essential part of the educational assessment process, yet often it does not receive enough attention. Because teachers and principals are concerned with many components of the testing process, it is important for the assessment office to focus attention on test administration. This ERIC digest presents seven strategies that the assessment director may employ to improve test administration practices. These strategies highlight clear communication, the responsibility of the building test coordinator, and rewarding and reinforcing quality. Full text is available at *http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed431819.html*.

A Profile of Community Engagement in Standards and Assessment

Gwinnett County, Georgia

The Gwinnett County Public Schools—already the largest school system in Georgia—attract about 5,000 new students each year, as their families, drawn by economic opportunities in the thriving metropolitan Atlanta area, move into the community. Most parents know that this suburban school system has earned a solid reputation for academic success. But in the early- to mid-1990s, the community had lost much of its confidence in its public schools, even though students continued to receive good test scores. The public expressed dissatisfaction with the district's emphasis on outcomes-based education (OBE)—an educational theory that guides curriculum by setting goals for students to accomplish and focuses more on goals or "outcomes" than on "inputs" or subject content. As OBE came under intense scrutiny and criticism nationally, it fell out of favor locally as well. In Gwinnett, two superintendents came and went in a fairly short time, and two school board members were defeated in school board elections. Community members demanded that the school district explain exactly what students were learning in school each day and more clearly outline curriculum objectives.

The Gwinnett board of education paid heed to the community's views and took prompt action. To regain public confidence, the district began to involve the community extensively in determining the Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS) students would need to flourish in the world of postsecondary education and in the workforce.

In November 1995, the school board and Superintendent Alvin Wilbanks commissioned a new group, the Gwinnett Educational Management System (GEMS) Oversight Committee, comprised of 24 parent and community representatives and 24 participants from the school system, to make certain that standards were high and curriculum objectives were clear and acceptable to the public. The committee was also charged with determining the grades that would be used for Gateway Assessments—a testing program that would measure how well students met the standards prescribed by the curriculum.

Beginning in 1995, teams of teachers and curriculum department personnel proposed the essential knowledge and skills for each grade level and course. In proposing objectives, the teams reviewed state and national standards, such as those recommended by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Then focus groups comprised of business and community leaders reviewed the proposed standards. In addition, more than 3,300 parents, community members, and school employees gave feedback through surveys.

The AKS formulation was also reviewed and objectives analyzed for correlations with the state's Quality Core Curriculum, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the High School Graduation Test, and the Scholastic Achievement Test, so that students would be prepared to do well on any standard state or national measures of achievement.

Using the data, the GEMS Oversight Committee proposed the essential AKS and the grade levels for gateway tests that assess students' mastery of the curriculum. In April 1996, the superintendent recommended that the school board adopt the standards the community had approved. That fall, the district began to publish detailed booklets for parents explaining what they could expect their children to learn. As one example, fourth-grade language arts has a variety of knowledge categories: listening and speaking; reading; vocabulary; phonics and word identification; writing; grammar, usage, and mechanics; spelling; and accessing information and reference and study skills. The "reading" section alone has 19 objectives, ranging from "read for a purpose" to "identify figurative use of language" to "follow multi-step written directions." On the school system's Intranet, its internal Web communications system, teachers can find sample test items and lesson plans that help them assess whether a child has achieved a particular objective.

The review process was repeated in 1997 and 1998 as the school system developed the AKS in additional subjects. To date, the board of education has adopted AKS in all subject areas and grade levels, with feedback from more than 6,200 teachers, parents, and community members. This process is continued each year as new courses are developed and/or

changes are recommended for existing courses. Each year, the GEMS Oversight Committee studies the comments gathered from community members, parents, and faculty as they review the AKS and the Gateway Assessment Project.

The assessments, now in development for grades four, five, seven, eight, and 10, will measure all students' achievement of the curriculum. Their development has included extensive reviews by parents and community members. No test item that has not undergone public review is included on any of the assessments.

The tests are an "objective check on our standards" at certain grade levels, says Associate Superintendent Cindy Loe. "If we're doing things right, the tests will validate what teachers have seen in the classroom." Children not performing well on the tests will be able to attend a free summer school and take another form of the test.

District leaders say that the involvement of community members and parents in validating curriculum standards is imperative to provide accountability to the community at large for the educational programs that the school system offers.

The district also saw the involvement of business and industry as vital, and to foster this participation, the school system began the "Together for Tomorrow" partnerships in 1997. Led by the Educational Leadership division of the system, this initiative provides a way for the school system to join together with business and industry, postsecondary institutions, and government and community members to enhance academic knowledge and skills and workforce development.

To further ensure community involvement in system initiatives, community advisory councils exist at both the district and local school levels. In 1995, the superintendent called for each school to establish a Council of School Improvement (CSI), made up of parents, community members, and educators. Each group works with administrators to establish school improvement goals and the programs necessary to reach those goals. Each Gwinnett County school also has a Parent-Teacher Association or a Parent-Teacher-Student Association. Gwinnett's PTA boasts one of the largest memberships in the nation and has won numerous state awards.

In addition, the Superintendent formed a Council of Community Advisors, comprised of more than 100 parents and community leaders, in the fall of 1998. These council members, who meet with the superintendent quarterly, advise him on key issues such as safety and security and serve as key communicators within their communities. The group informed the superintendent that, while the Gwinnett community favored the Gateway Assessments, the public also wanted to be certain that the tests were valid, reliable, and fair, and did not discriminate against any group.

Since these initiatives were implemented, the district's test scores, which are consistently above state and national averages, indicate an increase in student achievement across disciplines. The 1998 Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) results for Gwinnett County have, in almost all cases, demonstrated incremental gains over previous year's scores. The 1996-97 third-grade ITBS reading and mathematics scores were the highest ever reported for Gwinnett County since the test was mandated.

Over the past three years, ITBS scores for sixth-grade students have risen 3 percentile points in reading and 10 percentile points in mathematics. Fifth-grade Georgia Writing Test Scores for the past three years show marked improvements in the upper stages of proficiency; the 1996-97 scores showed the greatest increase over state and metro Atlanta averages ever reported for Gwinnett County students on that test instrument. Gwinnett's Georgia High School Graduation Test scores surpass both the state and metro Atlanta averages. Since the implementation of the AKS, scores on the SAT have shown dramatic increases above the national average.

"The involvement of community members and parents in validating curriculum standards is imperative to provide accountability to the community at large."

In addition, perception surveys of Gwinnett's faculty, taken in the spring of 1997, indicate an overwhelmingly positive response toward the curriculum changes and a belief that the system initiatives are increasing student achievement. Informal feedback from parents and community members, given through community meetings and local school forums, indicate that the community believes that Gwinnett is "on the right track" in improving student achievement and providing students with the knowledge and skills to be successful after high school.

The school system is taking a leadership role in education in Georgia, the Southeast, and the nation. Superintendent Wilbanks and the Gwinnett board of education received the Georgia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's 1998 Leadership KELLY Award in recognition of their contribution to student achievement.

School Board Chair Mary Kay Murphy recommends that school systems embarking on a public engagement process establish a research-based strategic planning process and seek representation from all segments of the public. "Welcome public input," Loe suggests. "It makes your system stronger and helps keep you focused on what's important—the best education you can possibly provide for each student. If you satisfy the needs of your customers, they will make the choice to stay with public education."

For more information, contact Cindy Loe, associate superintendent, at (678)377-3890. The Web site is *http://www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us*.

This profile is excerpted from *The Community Connection: Case Studies in Public Engagement*, by Anne Wright and Judith Brody Saks. Published by the National School Boards Association, 2000.

chapter 5
Accountability

Accountability is one of the most frequently heard words in discussions about public education today. Community advocates clamor for it. Politicians promise it. Business leaders criticize the lack of it. Parents demand it from teachers. Teachers demand it from parents. And everyone expects it from students. But what is accountability?

Accountability means taking your fair share of responsibility for outcomes. Being accountable means that you answer for your actions as well as the results of your actions. Accountability includes not only taking credit but also accepting blame. In public education, all stakeholders share accountability for student success. Effective leadership by the school board and the superintendent can establish a shared accountability process that improves student achievement. Such a process has a number of characteristics.

1. **A strong accountability process focuses on student results.**

We in public education have a bottom line—student results. This is a new way of thinking for many of us. Public entities frequently measure their effectiveness in terms of input. That is, we measure how many individuals are assigned to a task or how many hours are required to complete it. Sometimes we describe our results in output. For example, we offer a checklist of tasks accomplished or work projects completed. We are now coming to the point of answering to the public in terms of outcomes or actual results. For education, that translates to improved student achievement. Accountability is not just about what you did but, more important, about what difference it made.

2. **A comprehensive data collection process is established to answer the question, "How well are we doing?"**

Determining results requires having the capacity to ask and answer all kinds of questions about student achievement. The system must be able to account for each and every student. Data are collected and analyzed on individual student progress, school progress, and district progress. Data are disaggregated by gender, race, or other factors that could highlight disparate group results. Access to the data is readily available to all stakeholders. Results are reported in a cumulative format to track progress over time. Success is measured by improved student achievement.

3. **Individual student results are measured against expectations set by district standards.**

Student results are not based on the traditional approach of determining success; that is, comparing students' performance against the performance of others. Such a perspective guarantees winners and losers. Some students will always come out at the top, some in the middle, and some at the bottom. This says nothing about the students' performance compared to what they are expected to know and be able to do. Clear expectations, together with clear measures of mastery, are the yardstick for determining student achievement results.

4. **All school and district data are publicly reported in a straightforward format that is easy to understand.**

Results are provided to parents in a timely manner. The reporting format should include cumulative data that clearly track the student's progress from year to year. Parents should be able to see clearly how their child's performance compares to district standards. They should also be given information that tells them how their child's performance compares to other students in the same school as well as to students at the district, state, and national levels. Most important, parents should be made aware of interventions and supports being implemented in the event that their child's performance does not meet the established standards.

5. **Student data are analyzed with respect to growth and improvement, not just end results.**

Multiple pieces of data must be collected and analyzed from many perspectives. Certainly, proficiency must be measured—how students perform in relation to district and state standards. It is also necessary to be able to measure how much academic gain each student makes each year. Growth is as important a consideration as proficiency when setting up an accountability structure. Often, it is a more significant measure of school and classroom effectiveness and impact than proficiency alone. Both are needed. In addition, the accountability system must incorporate a standard of equity for all students. Disaggregation of data by race, gender, and socioeconomic factors is essential to gain insights and perspectives on differential success rates or identify where help is needed.

6. Student results are included as part of staff evaluations.

This component is complicated to execute but essential to an effective accountability process. If individual teachers, principals, and other staff members are going to be held accountable for student results, it is critical that their impact can be fairly measured. An accountability process must take into consideration not only results but also where the student began. Two students can end the year at the same achievement level, but they may have begun the year at different levels. Likewise, two students could begin the school year at the same level of achievement but end the year with very different results. In both cases, one student gained more learning than the other student gained in one year's time. This is why annual assessments are so important. If you don't measure student progress annually, you can't determine growth. If you can't determine annual growth, you can't determine teacher impact. And finally, if you can't determine teacher impact you can't hold teachers or yourselves accountable.

Many factors contribute to students' success or failure. Some students come to school with a background of advantages; others, with disadvantages and burdens that impede their opportunities for success. Despite these differences, success or failure is not predetermined. In fact, patterns of student success or failure can often be attributed to individual teachers. Data analysis of student results should be an integral part of the teacher evaluation process. Teachers who consistently produce greater-than-average grains in student achievement should be recognized and should share their expertise with colleagues. Teachers whose students consistently achieve below expectations need to have their teaching strategies carefully analyzed and corrected.

7. Student results drive decision making.

Most school districts report their student results, but if reporting results is the endgame, the district does not have an accountability process. Accountability occurs when a district uses the information from student results to make educational decisions. Results should be analyzed to determine trends and patterns. In particular, results can identify successful programs and programs that need to be improved or eliminated. Decisions to change or to eliminate ineffective programs are the difficult decisions that accountable district leadership must make. With an effective accountability process, these decisions are not based solely on perceptions and politics, but on facts and focus. Leaders keep their priorities in focus by constantly asking themselves, "How will this decision improve student performance?" They then analyze the data to monitor the effectiveness of their decisions. Success is recognized and rewarded. Lack of success drives visible change and improvement efforts. Decision making moves from being driven by politics and perceptions to being driven by facts and focus.

Everyone owns accountability for student achievement. Responsibility for learning goes from the board and superintendent all the way to, and including, students and parents.

Accountability Self-Assessment

Use this tool to assess your initial understanding of accountability and to get a sense of where you are as a board on this key action. Indicate the degree to which your board/district has achieved the following elements for establishing accountability for improving student achievement.

	Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Beginning to Achieve
Our district publishes an annual report of progress.				
Our annual report includes data on student achievement and district performance related to district goals and standards.				
The format of our report is consistent from year to year and includes data from prior years.				
We compare our data with data from other districts that are similar to ours.				
We examine our data by gender, race, and socioeconomic status to measure the success of all students.				
We use our student-achievement data to make decisions and establish district priorities.				
We communicate to the public how our decisions are linked to student-achievement data.				
Principals and teachers use student-achievement data to make decisions and set instructional priorities.				
We use our student-achievement data to plan staff development and to recognize and reward teacher performance.				
We tie evaluations of staff and of ourselves as board members to the data analysis.				

Accountability Questions the School Board Should Ask Itself

- How do we involve the community in defining an accountability process?
- How do we ensure that our decisions are research based and data driven?
- How do we identify and explore options?
- Are the school board, administrators, and teachers committed to and held accountable for attaining the goals and objectives of strategic plans?
- What measures and indicators are used to assess progress and in what areas?
- Are achievement measures and indicators reported to teachers, parents, and the public?
- Are goals and results presented in clear and quantifiable terms?
- Do the school board and superintendent evaluate themselves in terms of student achievement and recognize that much of their authority is derived from a public that has confidence in its schools?

Accountability Questions the School Board Should Ask the Superintendent and Staff

- Is there an accountability system that utilizes data on staff, students, funds, and other key elements?
- Do staff and students understand what is expected of them?
- How is success or failure assessed?
- What are the system's rewards and consequences?
- What are the contents and timing of reports, and who is the audience for the report?
- How are parents encouraged to be responsible partners in their child's education?

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Accountability	
The school board	The superintendent
1. Establishes an accountability process with measurable criteria and ensures an annual review.	1a. Recommends an accountability process to the board based on the district's strategic plan, standards and other important factors. 1b. Leads an annual review of the accountability process and recommends changes based on student performance. 1c. Ensures that data and accountability measures are used at district/school level to set instructional priorities. 1d. Ensures staff evaluations are linked to accountability measures. 1e. Requires professional development on the accountability process.
2. Participates in work sessions to understand accountability measures, including data analysis and how the board, administration, and staff should use this information.	2a. Plans periodic training for the board on accountability measures, including the use and application of data. 2b. Ensures staff training in the use of data and other accountability measures.
3. Ensures that the superintendent's evaluation includes accountability measures.	3a. Works with the board to identify accountability measures to be used in the superintendent's evaluation.
4. Recognizes and rewards teachers who consistently produce greater-than-average student improvement gains.	4a. Identifies a program to recognize teachers who consistently produce greater-than-average gains 4b. Carries out the recognition program.
5. Supports the superintendent's recommendation for dismissal or nonrenewal when warranted.	5a. Develops a process to identify teachers whose students consistently fail to make expected gains. 5b. Makes the board aware of district assistance available to these teachers. 5c. Monitors teachers' progress toward improvement. 5d. Recommends dismissal or nonrenewal.
6. Ensures effective and timely communications on the accountability system and progress.	6a. Analyzes data and other accountability measures and presents explanation in a "user friendly" way to the board and the community. 6b. Communicates, through the district's communications plan, use of and progress with accountability measures to improve student achievement. 6c. Ensures that an annual report is developed containing data on student achievement and district performance data related to goals and standards.
7. Ensures funding to implement accountability measures.	7. Presents budget recommendations and rationale to the board.
8. Evaluates itself on board goals related to student achievement. (See Vision)	8. Works with the board to develop its evaluation process.

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Accountability (Continued)	
The school board	The superintendent
9. Uses student achievement results to drive decision making.	9. Reports all information relative to improved student achievement and makes recommendations on needed changes.
10. Ensures compliance to state accountability measures.	10a. Makes the board aware of any state-mandated reporting requirements for student learning. 10b. Ensures adherence at district/school levels. 10c. Shares data with the board concerning state mandates.
11. Ensures that parents receive annual personalized data on their children's achievement.	11a. Develops a system for providing parents with cumulative data that clearly traces individual progress from year to year and shows progress on meeting district standards. 11b. Ensures a system to provide parents whose students fail to meet district standards with information on district resources and alternatives available.

Planning Team Considerations for Developing a Plan for Accountability

1. What process will we use to determine if the following components are present in our system of accountability?
   - Clear accountability for each and every student
   - Clear indication of student proficiency
   - Method for determining annual student academic growth or improvement
   - Capacity to disaggregate student results by race, gender, socioeconomics, or other identifiable groups
   - Capacity to measure school effectiveness
   - Capacity to tie student progress to individual teachers
   - Capacity to incorporate student results as part of staff evaluation
2. What's our time line for our first steps, and how can we determine what's a reasonable time frame for having a system of accountability in place?
3. How will we involve teachers, parents, and community members in the accountability process?

Resources on Accountability

Allen, Lauren E. and Anne C. Hallett. *Beyond Finger-Pointing and Test Scores*. Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 1999. 189 pp.
This book discusses the issues surrounding the increased emphasis on accountability in low-performing urban schools. It describes, analyzes, and draws lessons and recommendations from case studies of current interventions, which are primarily district-led. It advocates a process of reciprocal accountability: strategies and systems in which responsibility is shared among schools, communities, school districts, and the state. A useful appendix contains an intervention standards rating document, indicators for measuring school success, and tools for identifying promising practices and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. The book is available from the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 407 S. Dearborn St., Chicago, IL 60605; http://www.crosscity.org.

Brown, Richard S. "Creating School Accountability Reports." *The School Administrator*, November 1999, pp. 12-17.

A researcher offers guidance on delivering what parents most want to know about their schools. Suggestions include: (1) Determine what the public wants to see in a school report card; (2) decide how to present data; (3) focus on measures that are under the school's control; and (4) carefully consider audience, purpose, format, quality of data, and credibility of the report. Full text is available at http://www.aasa.org/SA/nov9908.htm.

Designing and Implementing Standards-Based Accountability Systems. Denver, Colo.: Education Commission of the States, 1998. 42 pp.

This publication provides a basis for establishing and evaluating accountability systems at the state, district, or school level. It addresses major accountability issues for policymakers and how state, district and school accountability systems should be coordinated. It also takes the reader through 10 key policy issues critical to designing and implementing accountability systems. For sale by ECS, (303) 299-3600; http://www.ecs.org.

Fuhrman, Susan H. "The New Accountability. " *CPRE Policy Briefs*, January 1999. 11 pp. Published by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

This policy brief discusses the characteristics of new accountability systems, including the issues to be considered in their design and implementation. Some recent research on the effectiveness of these systems is discussed. The author concludes that "new accountability systems that are well designed (with fair, comprehensible, meaningful, and stable features) are associated with improved student achievement when adequate capacity to improve instruction is present in schools or can be provided by an outside partner." Full text is available at http://www.gse.upenn.edu/cpre/docs/pubs/briefs.html.

"How States Are Responding to Low-Performing Schools." *State Education Leader*, vol. 18, no. 1, Winter 2000, pp. 13-14.

This article summarizes how states with accountability systems intervene in districts and/or schools that are designated as low-performing. Includes brief discussions of watch/warning status, probation, and remedies such as reconstitution or takeover. Full text is available through http://www.ecs.org/ecs/ecsweb.nsf/Web/HOME+PAGE?OpenDocument. (Type article title in Quick Search box and click on Go.)

Lashway, Larry. "Holding Schools Accountable for Achievement. *ERIC Digest* no. 130, 1999. 4 pp. Published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.
During the past decade, virtually all the states have re-engineered their accountability systems, not only setting more rigorous expectations, but also changing the focus from inputs to results. School leaders now must actively demonstrate that they are doing a good job with student achievement. This digest describes the key features of current accountability systems and explores their implications for school leaders. A resource list is included. Full text is available at http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed434381.html.

"Back to Basics—Indicators as a System." *CRESST Line*, Winter 1998. Published by the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing.

This paper argues for categorizing indicators used in accountability systems according to whether or not the indicators are under the schools' direct control. Criteria for improving the design and use of indicator systems are also discussed. Full text is available at http://www.cse.ucla.edu/CRESST/pages/newsletters.htm.

Quality Counts '99: Rewarding Results, Punishing Failure. Produced by Editorial Projects in Education in collaboration with The Pew Charitable Trusts. *Education Week*, vol. XVIII, no. 117, January 11, 1999. 206 pp.

This publication details the findings of an exhaustive, 50-state survey of state policies on accountability. It examines how states will hold schools, students, and educators responsible. It also examines how states measure student performance, report results to the public, rate the quality of schools, motivate good performers and assist bad ones, and intervene in failing schools. *Quality Counts* also assesses the progress toward education reform by summarizing how each state is doing in key performance areas such as student achievement, standards, assessment, teacher quality, school climate, and resources. Full text is available at http://www.edweek.com/sreports/qc99/exsum.htm.

"What Makes a Good High-Stakes Accountability System?" *State Education Leader*, vol. 18, no. 1, Winter 2000, p. 20.
In spite of the controversy surrounding standards-based assessment systems, policymakers can take steps to alleviate problems and improve the impact and uses of assessment systems. Ten suggestions from the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) are presented. Full text is available through http://www.ecs.org/ecs/ecsweb.nsf/Web/HOME+PAGE?OpenDocument. (Type title of article in Quick Search box and click on Go.)

A Profile of Community Engagement in Accountability

Houston, Texas

The Houston Independent School District (HISD)—the largest school system in Texas and the seventh largest in the nation—was facing a sea of troubles 15 years ago. Statewide performance assessments in the mid-1980s revealed that 159 of the 232 schools that then existed in the district were on the state's list of low-performing schools. In 1993, when the superintendent and school board took the bold step of "reconstituting" or completing restaffing an elementary school that was especially troubled academically, 56 Houston schools had fewer than 20 percent of students passing statewide examinations. In 1996, although a quarter of Houston's students attended school in temporary classrooms, the community voted down a $390 million bond issue that would have funded the construction of 15 new schools and renovations at 84 older ones.

However, through a systematic effort to restructure and decentralize schools and to involve the public in the process, this sprawling school district has become an urban success story. Although nearly three-fourths of its 211,000 students meet federal criteria for free or reduced-price lunch, and nearly a quarter have limited English-language proficiency, the district has seen significant improvements in student achievement at all levels, in all subjects, and with all types of students. The school district now has the highest percentage of urban schools in the state earning exemplary ratings from the Texas Education Agency. It was the first large school district in Texas to end social promotion.

In the fall of 1998, voters responded enthusiastically to the changes they saw in the district by approving the largest bond issue in HISD history—a $678 million school construction and repair program—by a landslide majority of 73 percent. And in February 1999, President Bill Clinton cited HISD as an example of a school system doing the right thing by working hard and aggressively intervening to raise student achievement. Houston learned that the public's involvement in, and support of, its schools is essential to success. This lesson is so much a part of the district's philosophy that HISD's Web site declares: "The strategic intent is to earn so much respect from the citizens of Houston that HISD becomes their K-12 educational system of choice."

The district initiated a community engagement effort in 1992, after the business community rebuffed an attempt to raise taxes significantly. It became clear, school leaders say, that the district needed to engage both parents and the broader community in more significant ways as it developed its strategic plans. A plan was recommended to decentralize the school district's central administration and create school feeder patterns that would bring decisions and resources closer to the communities they served.

At the same time, the district fostered shared decision-making committees on each campus. These councils gave teachers, parents, business leaders, and community members a voice in the planning and operation of the schools. The areas for discussion included curriculum, staffing, budget, and professional development.

In 1994, the district created 12 administrative districts that were arms of the central office; they were located in community facilities across the city to give students and parents more personalized service and more immediate assistance. Planning became a combination of districtwide and administrative district efforts, with parent advisory committees at both levels, as well as shared decision-making committees at schools, administrative districts, and central office levels. The district also has initiated four ad hoc advisory committees that provide regular feedback to the superintendent on actions as seen from the perspectives of teachers, principals, high school students, and parents. These committees meet monthly for a free-wheeling dialogue on any issues that participants choose to address. This broad-based input has led to far better decision making than in the past, HISD leaders say.

> *"The strategic intent is to earn so much respect from the citizens of Houston that HISD becomes their K-12 educational system of choice."*

A key public engagement effort is the Peer Examination, Evaluation, and Review (PEER) process, which brings in experts from the community, businesses, and organizations to work with district staff to address specific issues or problems. Each PEER committee receives a charter from the administration that specifies the problem the committee is asked to address.

The charter also provides a timeline and suggestions for activities that will be supported by district staff. Topics have included the district's guidance and counseling services, human resources organization and procedures, criminal background checks, staff development goals and processes, the district's reading program, and compensation for teachers. Twenty-two PEER committees have been chartered to date. At the conclusion of its work, a PEER committee reports its findings to the school board, and the administration develops a plan to carry out actions on which the board and administration agree.

A PEER committee that addressed the district's reading program played a key role in making substantive changes in the district's approach to literacy in the early grades. Although school-based decision making had given Houston principals and teachers wide latitude in determining the instructional strategies that best fit students in their own schools, many teachers and administrators believed reading had to be tackled from a systemwide perspective. Because Houston students had a high mobility rate, they often suffered from the fact that different reading approaches—phonics versus whole language—existed at different schools. To settle the issue, Superintendent Rod Paige appointed a PEER committee that spent months reviewing research, discussing the issue, and conducting focus groups. In the end, the committee recommended a "balanced approach" that combined the skills in decoding language with literature-rich activities. The district now mandates that reading in grades K-3 be taught in an uninterrupted block of time—at least 90 minutes a day—using a balanced six-part approach. Backed up by substantial financial resources and professional development, Houston's reading program is now considered a national model.

In 1998, looking for ways to enhance its decentralization efforts and give even more authority to individual HISD schools, Superintendent Paige established a PEER Committee on district decentralization. The committee was asked to develop a fair, equitable, and effective decentralized approach to resource allocation, decide which areas of management and operations could be handled most effectively at the campus level, and develop a new way to fund schools. Its guiding principles were academic success, the allocation of all resources to schools (unless efficiency or other management issues dictated otherwise), equity in funding, matched or linked accountability and resource allocation decisions, and implementation guided by good sense. Chaired by the chief administrative officer for the City of Houston, the 15-member committee included the city's controller, officers of major banks and other business members, university faculty, parents, and HISD principals and administrators.

For six months, the committee explored various ways to send centralized resources directly to the schools and considered which central office responsibilities should be reassigned to schools and which jobs should remain under the direction of the central administration. The committee also studied whether to hire additional private companies to perform more business functions (Houston already uses outside companies to handle food service, maintenance, and other areas) and whether to establish some existing central administration services on a "user fee" basis for schools.

The committee's report recommended major changes in the management of schools. Under the proposal, individual schools would have 80 percent of the district's money under their direct control (excluding funds for construction, debt service, and other capital expenditures). The committee also recommended giving schools more control over a wide variety of functions. While certain "core functions" would remain under the control of the central administration, those central departments could ultimately become "service centers" for the schools. The school board will review the report, which will be supplemented by additional analyses. If the board accepts the recommendations, school leaders say the report could have a far-reaching impact on the school district, decentralizing schools to a greater degree than ever before.

Not surprisingly, the district had experienced some roadblocks along the way. A small but vocal group of community members who did not believe the district was operating efficiently and effectively successfully defeated a 1996 bond issue that the district badly needed to relieve overcrowding and improve education. The district participated in an intensive, million-dollar audit by the state controller's office, which made suggestions for saving approximately 2 percent of the district's annual budget—a testament to the district's efficiency, school leaders say. The enthusiasm with which the district embraced the audit's suggestions resulted in an increased level of trust among the citizens of Houston. In fact, the district found that its willingness to accept criticism and use it to improve the system has been a major factor in developing community support.

For more information, contact Susan Sclafani, chief of staff for educational services, Houston Independent School District, at (713) 892-6329. The district's Web site is *http://www.houstonisd.org*.

This profile is excerpted from The Community Connection: Case Studies in Public Engagement, by Anne Wright and Judith Brody Saks. Published by the National School Boards Association, 2000.

chapter 6
Alignment

Resource alignment is another key to achieving your vision for improved student achievement. How you use your resources determines how close you can come to achieving your stated goals. In fact, how you use your resources sends a message to staff and constituents as to how serious you are about your goals. Some key action areas such as standards and assessment rely more heavily on staff to accomplish them. When it is time to determine how resources are directed, school board members must step up to the plate. The old phrase about putting your money where your mouth is may be a tired one, but it applies directly in this area. Try to step back and reflect on what you say is important as a school district, compared to what you do and how you act as the leadership team.

How do you spend your money?

Nothing conveys what is important to a school district more than the budget. You may say that accelerating reading skills in the early years is a top priority, but if money available for improvements is directed toward increasing the number of Advanced Placement offerings at the high school, a mixed message is being sent and received. As a school board, you need to determine how you will spend your money to achieve your vision and goals. In fact, an initial step may be to determine how you make budget decisions in the first place.

Often school boards feel they have little control over budget decisions. Fundamental operating costs are long established and difficult to alter. Community groups, employee organizations, and others have learned to exert political influence on the budget process. When money is tight, people run to defend their turf and protect themselves from cuts. When money is available for growth or improvement, they all come to get their piece of the pie. School boards find themselves caught in the middle. It is natural to want to be responsive to constituents, but school boards that have established clear goals and priorities based on input from all the stakeholders will focus on making spending decisions that support the shared vision.

How is staff allocated?

Education is a people-intensive business. The preponderance of the budget is directed to human resources. How is the distribution of those human resources determined? This process varies significantly from district to district. Some districts determine all staffing decisions at the district level using fixed formulae that have been set in place over time. Districts that favor this approach believe it guarantees consistency and equality throughout the district. Critics of this approach contend that it does not take into account the varying needs of students in different communities. They are concerned that equality does not guarantee equity, and that the district is responsible for taking care of the needs of all students. Districts at the other end of the spectrum turn budget decisions over to each school using a site-based decision-making approach. These districts believe that schools know best what their students need and can more effectively direct staff use. Critics of this approach contend that inconsistencies occur from school to school in program offerings and quality. They see a system of schools rather than a school system, with students in less influential communities getting shortchanged.

Between these two extremes are various combinations that attempt to balance the need for fundamental program consistency and quality with the need to provide for divergent student and community needs. Some districts direct basic allocations at the district level and then supplement these allocations based on the needs of the individual schools. Other districts have developed weighted formulae for determining equitable staffing and resource allocations based on individual student needs. Whatever process your school board uses, you should be able to see how that process directly supports the priorities you have established for achieving desired student results. Moreover, all stakeholders should be able to see that same direct correlation. Thus, the only way to argue with the allocation process would be to disagree with the priorities themselves, which is where the debate belongs.

How is the curriculum aligned?

Developing curriculum is the work of staff, but ensuring that that curriculum supports the district's priorities for student achievement is part of the Key Work of School Boards. Board members should be aware of certain critical checkpoints

and questions. After all, the curriculum is where your product quality control begins. If your curriculum is not directly tied to the learning standards set by the district and the state, how can teachers and students expect to achieve the desired performance results? Curricular congruency and alignment must begin with pre-kindergarten and continue through grade 12. The curriculum must be clearly sequenced K-12 within each content area to make sure students are being taught what they are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level. In other words, the curriculum should be a standards-based curriculum using both external and internal standards as they are established.

Having a standards-based curriculum does not mean that the curriculum is a lock-step march for all students, however. Opportunities for students to accelerate should be evident throughout the curriculum. Likewise, the curriculum must provide opportunities and accommodations for students with special needs to ensure that they are successful in meeting the standards. Instructional strategies and sample assessments based on best practices and research should be included for teacher support. The curriculum should serve as the framework and guide for the classroom teacher, but it should never preclude the teacher's own skills and adaptations to help students succeed.

How is staff development aligned?

Most school districts spend significant time and money on training staff. This training may be provided directly by the school district, or the district may support advanced training at institutions of higher education through tuition reimbursement. Many districts offer both opportunities. The question of support for training is not just one of quantity or even quality. The challenge for school boards is to be clear about whether the training being provided will advance the priorities of the school district. In particular, you will want to understand how the training contributes to improving student achievement.

Consider the following example: A school district determines that improving student achievement in mathematics in elementary schools is a priority. One of the decisions made by the board is that elementary teachers need more content expertise. As a consequence, the board doubles the number of math credits required for teachers in the district and sets a deadline for current staff to meet the new requirement. At the same time the district continues with its current set of course offerings for staff training, which do not include any math content courses. It also continues with a tuition reimbursement policy of first come, first served. Thus, the district is spending time and money on training, but none of it supports the board's goal to enhance elementary teachers' math content. By shifting the training to math content, the district not only will make the best use of time and money but also will focus on the message that elementary mathematics achievement is a district priority.

The same argument could be made for other significant training issues, such as technology, students with special needs, and cultural diversity. The capacity of staff development to be flexible and to adapt to the focus and direction of the school district is an essential key to alignment. The board needs to understand the types of training being offered and the proportion of that training that is clearly tied to district priorities. Training needs to directly support the results you seek.

How are other resources aligned?

You should know the process used to determine the selection of textbooks, instructional materials, and technology. Is the process consistent throughout the district, or are selections made school by school? What part do these resources play in achieving the desired results? If technology is a major thrust of the school district, all students must have equal access to technology. Teachers must be competent to integrate the use of technology throughout the instructional program. Facilities themselves demonstrate alignment or the lack thereof.

Alignment is most likely to occur when everyone is clear about the goals and directs all energies toward achieving them. Alignment is the difference between a regatta and an armada.

Alignment Self-Assessment

Use this tool to assess your initial understanding of alignment and to get a sense of where you are as a board on this key action. Indicate the degree to which your board/district has achieved the following elements in aligning resources for improving student achievement.

	Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Beginning to Achieve
We have established a specific and limited set of priorities for improving student achievement that give everyone in the district clear focus.				
We make staffing and resource allocation decisions based on our student achievement priorities.				
We ensure resource equity for schools by providing additional supports to schools in communities with higher needs.				
We view the budget as the vehicle for accomplishing our priorities rather than simply as our spending plan.				
We leverage resources within our budget to achieve our priorities.				
We add or delete programs and initiatives based on analysis of data and district priorities.				
We have no "sacred cows" within our budget.				
Our curriculum and program initiatives are directly aligned with our student achievement priorities.				
Our selection of textbooks, instructional materials, and technology is directed by our student achievement priorities.				
Our staff training is designed exclusively to support our student achievement priorities.				

Alignment Questions the School Board Should Ask Itself

1. About staffing and staff development:
   - How do staff development efforts relate to student achievement goals and objectives?
   - How are our staff development priorities determined?
   - How can teacher mentoring and collaboration be encouraged?
2. About curriculum and technology:
   - How do we determine whether the curriculum is aligned with state and district standards?
   - What policy and resources do we provide to meet the needs of at-risk, special needs, and accelerated students?
   - What policy and resources do we provide to ensure that students are encouraged to challenge themselves and to take challenging courses?
   - What policy and resources do we provide to ensure that technology is incorporated into the curriculum to enhance student learning and that teachers know how to use technology effectively?
   - How does the board model using technology to improve decision making?
3. About supplemental services:
   - How do we take into account students' social and emotional needs in our planning for achievement?
   - How do we reach out to other organizations to ensure that student needs are met?
   - What can we do to promote parental involvement in student learning?
   - How can greater use be made of school facilities to promote achievement?
   - How do we determine the community's concerns and beliefs about the types of student and community services it wants and would support?
4. About budgeting funds:
   - How do we align financial resources with student achievement plans and priorities?
   - How do we determine whether operational plans and budgets provide the necessary programs and resources to promote student achievement?
   - How do we evaluate programs for effectiveness?
   - How do we ensure that funding decisions are data-driven and research based?
   - Do we have a good understanding of budget reports, procedures, regulations, and opportunities for flexibility?
   - How do we ensure that budget information is provided to parents and other community members in an easy-to-understand format that conveys the relationships between budget items and student achievement initiatives?

Alignment Questions the School Board Should Ask the Superintendent and Staff

1. About staffing and staff development:
   - How are decisions made about spending for professional development?
   - How are teachers involved in setting professional development objectives and establishing professional development programs?
   - How are staff assignments made? Are they based on accountability and student needs?
   - How are teachers evaluated to determine if they are teaching to the standards that they and their students are held to?
2. About curriculum and technology:
   - Are enough staff members adequately trained to develop curriculum?
   - Do teachers have the support and understanding they need to align instruction with curriculum?
   - What's the process to ensure that textbooks and teaching materials are aligned with standards and the curriculum?
   - Are textbooks and other materials current?
   - What's the process used to determine whether technology is distributed and used equitably by staff and students?
   - How is technology integrated into the curriculum to enhance student achievement - higher order thinking and learning skills, student-centered learning, and collaboration and teamwork?
3. About supplemental services:
   - What is the process for timely identification of students who are having difficulty meeting standards or who have social and emotional needs that affect their academic performance?
   - What assistance is available to such students—tutoring, summer school, remediation, transition classes, conflict resolution, youth programs?
   - What services are available to students who are doing well—Advanced Placement and other enrichment programs?
   - What is the process for determining effective parent involvement programs?
   - What community services are offered in schools—early childhood education, parenting classes, day care?
4. About budgeting funds:
   - What's the process for evaluating programs for effectiveness and links to student achievement?
   - What process do we use to pursue grants or technical assistance from government agencies to advance student achievement plans?
   - How do we determine future budget requirements, and on what information are they based?
   - How is the community engaged in the budget process?

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Resource Alignment	
The school board	The superintendent
1. Participates in training to better understand how alignment of the following resources is related to student success in meeting standards: ▸ staffing and personnel evaluations ▸ facilities ▸ funding ▸ curriculum and instruction ▸ assessment ▸ technology	1a. Works with board to increase its awareness and understanding on how aligning resources can pay off in increased student achievement. 1b. Develops a process to ensure alignment of critical resources. 1c. Provides annual update on alignment process.
2. Ensures that curriculum alignment supports district priorities.	2a. Ensures development of curriculum directly tied to the learning standards set by the district and the state. 2b. Provides staff with the support, resources, information, and training needed to align instruction with curriculum. 2c. Reports to the board periodically and recommends additions or changes to ensure curriculum alignment.
3. Recognizes the authority of the superintendent to implement a districtwide organizational structure that empowers staff to meet the needs of all students.	3a. Aligns staff authority and responsibilities so that decisions for improving student achievement are made closest to the level of implementation. 3b. Reports to the board on progress and recommends changes.
4. Approves and monitors policies to ensure that students are encouraged to challenge themselves by taking higher-level courses.	4a. Recommends to the board policies and resources to encourage students to challenge themselves by taking higher-level courses. 4b. Implements polices adopted by the board and makes sure that they are carried out equitably. 4c. Provides the board with data on student enrollment and success in higher level courses. 4d. Conducts periodic review with the board to identify additional policies or review existing policies.
5. Considers students' instructional, social, and emotional needs when planning for improved student achievement.	5a. Develops a process for timely identification of students who are having difficulty meeting standards or who have social and emotional needs that affect their academic performance. 5b. Informs the board of assistance available to students, including tutoring, summer school, remediation, transition classes, conflict resolution, etc. 5c. Reports to the board the success or failure of programs and policies designed to help students meet achievement goals. 5d. Recommends changes or additions to programs and services based on student achievement data.

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Resource Alignment (Continued)	
The school board	The superintendent
6. Ensures staff development that will advance student achievement priorities of the district.	6a. Ensures a staff development program that supports student achievement priorities. 6b. Ensures that teachers and instructional staff are involved in setting staff development objectives and programs. 6c. Informs the board of staff development programs and their relationship to district student achievement priorities.
7. Approves the selection of textbooks and instructional materials that support instructional priorities.	7a. Develops a process that involves staff and appropriate stakeholders in recommending textbooks and teaching materials that support standards and the district curriculum. 7b. Recommends to the board textbooks and materials for adoption. 7c. Monitors and keeps the board aware of the success/failure of textbooks and materials to support the reaching of student achievement goals.
8. Ensures that technology is integrated into the curriculum to enhance student achievement	8a. Develops a plan for the use and integration of technology into the curriculum to improve student achievement. 8b. Ensures that technology is distributed and used equitably by staff and students. 8c. Ensures staff development and staff proficiency in the use of instructional technology. 8d. Recommends changes to the technology plan as needed.
9. Ensures school facilities that support student achievement goals.	9a. Develops a long-range facilities plan to enhance the instructional program using a collaborative approach. 9b. Works with staff and experts in school construction to determine costs and prioritize projects. 9c. Recommends prioritized facilities plan to the board with sources of funding. 9d. Secures funding for projects. 9e. Directs projects, ensures timely completion of projects, and monitors expenditures. 9f. Reports to the board periodically and recommends changes to the plan as needed.
10. Approves budget needs based on student achievement priorities.	10a. Recommends allocation of resources based on school/district student achievement priorities. 10b. Presents a recommended budget to the board based on resources needed to accomplish alignment. 10c. Monitors expenditures and periodically updates the board on the status of the budget 10d. Ensures effective communications explaining the district budget and the relationship it bears to student achievement goals

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Resource Alignment (Continued)	
The school board	The superintendent
11. Monitors progress of the district's instructional practices and programs as related to student achievement goals.	11a. Ensures that school/district instructional strategies are in place to meet student achievement goals. 11b. Recommends to the board programs that need to be added or deleted based on analysis of data and district priorities.
12. Ensures that the public understands the relationship between standards and the curriculum.	12. Communicates, through the district's communications plan, the relationship between standards and curriculum.

Planning Team Considerations for Developing a Plan for Alignment

1. What process will we use to review the following categories to determine whether there is alignment with the established district priorities for student achievement?
   - Curriculum
   - Textbook and instructional materials
   - Training
   - Staffing
   - Technology
   - Supplemental resources for equitable support
   - System operations
   - Budget—spending impact
2. Who are the key players in our community who will need to be involved in laying the groundwork for changing the way funds are allocated to programs? How can we get them involved early in this process?
3. What is a reasonable time frame, given our budgeting process, to expect realignment to begin to occur?

Resources on Alignment

Baker, Eva L. and Robert L. Linn. "Alignment: Policy Goals, Policy Strategies, and Policy Outcomes." *The CRESST Line*, Winter 2000, pp. 1-3.

Alignment, the linchpin of standards-based accountability systems, refers to the lining up of goals, standards, curriculum, capacity, and outcome measures. Alignment also has a broader meaning: It encompasses the logic between policy goals and the strategies enacted to meet those goals. This brief article discusses the relevance of validity standards to the process of alignment. Full text available at *http://www.cse.ucla.edu/CRESST/pages/products.htm*.

Berne, Robert *et al. Reinventing Central Office: A Primer for Successful Schools*. Chicago: Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 1995. 45pp.

This report recommends a fundamental revision of urban public school systems, one that shifts virtually all funds and most authority to the schools and dismantles centralized bureaucratic structures. It covers six key areas in which centralization can be reduced and local autonomy strengthened: (1) governance, (2) budgets, (3) curriculum and instruction, (4) personnel, (5) facilities and services, and (6) accountability. Four appendices outline powers and functions that should be shifted to the local schools; list proposed roles for schools, districts, and external groups; and provide lists of resources and individuals with expertise in educational improvement. The book is available from the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 407 S. Dearborn St., Suite 1725, Chicago, IL 60605. (312) 322-4880, *www.crosscity.org*, for $6.

Bushweller, Kevin. "Teaching to the Test." *American School Board Journal*, September 1997, pp. 20-25.

Teaching to the test has traditionally been a no-no for educators. However, viewed in the context of curriculum alignment, it can mean teaching knowledge and skills that are assessed by tests designed around academic standards set by the state. The article discusses attitudes and practices involved in forging links between what is taught in the classroom and what is tested in standardized exams. Full text is available at *http://www.asbj.com/199709/asbj0997.html*.

Colorito, Sonia. "Connecting Goals and Policy." *Texas Lone Star*, May 1999, pp. 18-21.

This article in the journal of the Texas School Boards Association discusses how policies can give emphasis, support, and direction to the school district's instructional program. It looks at the role of policy and suggests approaches for content, review, and evaluation. A "governance guide" summarizes recommended activities under the following key points: (1) Learn about the instructional program; (2) assess the instructional program based on goals and policies; (3) provide support for curriculum and instruction; (4) review policies related to instruction; and (5) adopt specific local policies in 10 areas.

Durkin, Bernard. "Block Scheduling: Structuring Time to Achieve National Standards in Mathematics and Science. *ERIC Digest*. ERIC Clearinghouse for Science, Mathematics, and Environmental Education, 1997. 4 pp.

Outlines the possibilities for structuring time differently in schools in order to achieve the goal of meeting national standards in science and mathematics. Also discusses the implications for staff development and assessment. Full text available at *http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed432441.html*.

Hadderman, Margaret. "School-based Budgeting." *ERIC Digest number 131*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1999. 4 pp.

School-based budgeting is the facilitative arm of school-based management, which shifts decision-making responsibilities from the district office to principals, teachers, and community members. In accordance with the trend to hold schools more accountable for results, a popular reform strategy is to give schools more authority over their budgets. This ERIC digest discusses the rationale for switching to school-based budgeting, implementation issues and obstacles, the experiences of specific schools, and emerging policy and research directions. Full text is available at *http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed434401.html*.

Odden, Allan. "Creating School Finance Policies that Facilitate New Goals." *CPRE Policy Briefs*, September 1998. 11 pp. Published by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

The author argues that creation of a new school finance structure that is more aligned with standards-based education reform is an important next step for education policymakers at the national, state, district and school levels. He recommends specific changes needed for each level. Full text is available at *http://www.gse.upenn.edu/cpre/docs/pubs/briefs.html*.

Picus, Lawrence O. "Setting Budget Priorities." *American School Board Journal*, May 2000, pp. 31-33.

The author argues that it is essential to change the budgeting and spending patterns in our nation's schools if we want to work out better ways to focus resources on student achievement. School officials need to change their attitude from "We don't have enough money" to "How can we use the money we have to accomplish our goals?" Without careful analysis of existing programs, a school district can find itself with a vast number of unrelated programs, some of which might even work at cross-purposes. It is important to evaluate and analyze all school district programs regularly and give careful thought to their costs and effectiveness in improving student achievement. Full text is available at *http://www.asbj.com/2000/05/0500coverstory.html*.

Tewel, Kenneth J. "Navigate with Vision." *The Executive Educator*, April 1996, pp. 16-19.

Crafting a vision and belief statement is just the beginning of the process of improving the education system. A district's vision and beliefs must be incorporated into the district's goals, strategies, policies, processes, cultural practices, management behavior, and accountability systems—in short, into everything the district does.

A Profile of Community Engagement in Alignment

Durham, North Carolina

Less than a decade ago, the Durham (N.C.) Public Schools faced a major challenge: the merger of city and county school districts into one system. How could the new district—which includes rural tobacco farmers, city dwellers with urban problems, and university professors and doctors in Research Triangle Park—identify common goals and find ways to reach them? How could the new district determine which policies and practices to keep and which to change? How could it move forward quickly to raise student achievement?

Community engagement, a long-standing tradition in Durham, was the key ingredient in Durham's evolution to a unified, high-functioning school system. The district that emerged from the consolidation process is diverse. Its 29,000 students are ethnically and socioeconomically diverse; 56 percent of the students are black, 35 percent are white, and four percent are Hispanic; 40 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. The district recognized that its paramount task was to involve all its stakeholders in creating a shared vision and mission for the new school system. That process had to be fully representative and sensitive to the needs and desires of a wide range of parents, students, staff, business, and community residents.

When talk of merger surfaced, a Merger Issues Task Force held a series of forums to promote community involvement. Local community leaders, in cooperation with school officials, initiated discussions in an attempt to gain consensus on key issues. An elected seven-member school board began to put several structures in place to ensure public participation in school district and school planning and to ensure that decisions were not dominated by one district or one faction.

The budget process is a good example of Durham's comprehensive approach to community involvement. In developing its proposed $225.3 million budget for 1999-2000, the school board and superintendent actively sought the community's advice, since decisions about what the budget would include affected a diverse group of community representatives. The budget process began in November 1998, when the superintendent, board of education chairman, and two senior staff members met with county executives to establish basic budget understandings. After a base budget and a growth budget were determined, the Budget Advisory Committee—a group of some 30 community representatives, business people, parents, and school officials—met to help set budget priorities. In the months that followed, Durham budget officials worked with community input, enrollment growth projections, estimated revenue, and other data to prepare preliminary proposals. The superintendent and assistant superintendents reviewed and discussed the proposals and fine-tuned the budget document before presenting it to the school board in April 1999.

The school district posted the budget proposal on its Web site and placed it in school libraries and at other locations so citizens could examine it. In their budget message to the community, Superintendent Ann Denlinger and Board Chairman Kathryn Meyers said that the requested increase would serve one main purpose: to retain and attract high-quality instructional staff by offering salaries that are competitive with other school districts. "Durham citizens must know that they receive a solid return for their investment in our system. They must feel confident that the district is being a responsible steward of their tax dollars," they said. "Accountability to the community we serve is crucial in determining our resources and how we make the most effective use of them."

> *"Community engagement, a long-standing tradition in Durham, was the key ingredient in Durham's evolution to a unified, high-functioning school system."*

Durham seeks the community's contribution in many other areas. For example, to allow comment on the district's long-term capital improvement campaign, each high school will host a forum for parents and other citizens who live in the school's feeder zones to discuss how the plan will affect each school in that particular zone. While any citizen can attend and speak at any of these forums, the district hopes that, by focusing attention on one area of the county at each forum, they will address each school's needs. These discussions should result in a plan that the entire community can support, said Michael Yarbrough, the district's media relations coordinator.

The school district also conducts focus group interviews within the community, usually in conjunction with a program evaluation of some area of school operation. Most recently, an evaluation of Vocational Education gave business leaders and parents the chance to express their opinions in focus group interviews.

By board policy, each school has a self-governing Site-based Decision-Making Committee (SBDM) which must include parents and representatives of the certified and classified staff and may include other members of the general school community. The 15 members of each school's committee are elected, ensuring that various publics will be adequately represented on any working committee subgroup. The SBDM committees exist in addition to PTAs, which flourish at most of Durham's 45 schools. A district-level SBDM oversight committee, which includes community representatives as well as a board member, coordinates the school-level committees, whose roles have been redefined to allow them to participate in both policy development and implementation. Increasingly, they are involved in reviewing and modifying board policy and in other issues that touch on school governance and management.

In fact, after extensive involvement of the SBDM committees at each school, the board of education adopted a vision statement that is printed on every school board agenda, embossed on the wall of the board room, and is invoked consistently by teachers, principals, and parents. That statement reads: "Durham Public Schools will ensure that all students achieve at their highest potential regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Each student will make continuous progress and be at or above grade level."

That vision led to the heart of the school system's reform efforts—five initiatives that form the structure of the budget and the actual work of the schools. These initiatives include a focus on early literacy efforts (grades K-3); the education of academically/intellectually gifted students; the creation of special programs for disaffected students; special attention to the needs of students who drop out of school; and magnet schools. The district reports its progress on these initiatives annually, with an update to county commissioners, who must evaluate funding requests for the coming year, said David Holdzkom, assistant superintendent for research, development, and accountability.

To support the decision-making process and to allow various issues to be examined more extensively, special working groups are created periodically and charged with studying a particular issue facing the board. In addition to the Budget Advisory Committee, other groups that include school and community representatives have addressed meeting the needs of school dropouts and students suspended from school and serving children in the Exceptional Children's program.

The road to unification has not been entirely smooth, however. One roadblock to true community engagement was a tendency in the community to accept politically negotiated solutions to problems, said Michael Yarbrough, the district's media relations coordinator. To counter that tendency, the board and superintendent have insisted on the need to make decisions that are educationally sound—rather than accept, solutions that are politically expedient. While this process is an ongoing one, he said, increasing numbers of people are willing to participate in appropriate ways in the decision-making process that drives the district's work.

The superintendent also made a concerted effort to have the administrative team function more effectively and efficiently. Although the district's 45 principals had always had group meetings, they now meet once, rather than twice, a month, and the meetings have been restructured to change the focus from administrative detail to thinking and learning, said Holdzkom. Now, for example, a morning presentation on an education topic, such as systems analysis and systems thinking, allows principals to learn something new. After the general presentation, the principals meet by grade level to discuss the topic and ask questions.

Through its various community engagement efforts, the school district has made steady progress toward its objective of raising student achievement.

For more information, contact Michael Yarbrough, media relations coordinator, at (919) 560-2602. The district's Web site is *http://www.dpsnc.com*.

This profile is excerpted from *The Community Connection: Case Studies in Public Engagement*, by Anne Wright and Judith Brody Saks. Published by the National School Boards Association, 2000.

chapter 7
Climate

Climate and the learning environment set the stage for teaching and learning. Both the overall climate of a school and the specific learning environment of an individual classroom have enormous influence on student achievement. Students cannot learn in chaos, fear, or embarrassment. They must feel safe, and they need an orderly structure that is supportive of them. Every child deserves respect, encouragement, and opportunities to learn and grow. How can school boards assess the climate of their district, their schools, and their classrooms? Where do they begin?

Ensure a safe environment for work and learning.

A fundamental assumption of quality education is that children and staff must have a safe place in which to learn and work. Recent school shootings and killings have shocked and devastated us all. We no longer take for granted that our child's school is a safe haven. School leaders must take steps to ensure to the best of their ability that schools remain a safe place. How frequently these actions are taken should not be a function of the location of the school and the community served. No community is exempt, and no school board can overlook this responsibility. School boards need to develop policies and expect procedures that protect students and staff on school property. One way to strengthen such policies is by collaborating with other local or state authorities to legislate and implement tougher laws to support school safety.

Some boards have enacted what are known as "zero tolerance" policies regarding specified unsafe student behavior. There is debate as to the effectiveness and the equity of such policies. What is the appropriate balance between an environment that is sufficiently controlled to be safe and yet sufficiently inviting to be attractive?
These decisions weigh heavily on school boards. Each board needs to have good data that describe the status of school climate. They need to seek and consider input from the communities they serve. They need to listen carefully to the recommendations of safety and security experts.

Creating and maintaining a safe environment is the necessary first step to a positive school climate, but it is not the only step. Climate is more than safety and order.

Examine the available data that reflect climate.

Contrary to popular assumptions, not all climate-related data are "soft." Specific data can reveal much about the climate of the learning environment. One simple source of information is attendance data. Although school attendance is mandatory, patterns of student absence can be detected when comparisons are made among schools, races, genders, neighborhoods, and other student groups. Disparity in attendance may raise questions about the nature of the learning environment. Lower attendance rates may reflect the lack of factors that contribute to success, such as student motivation, parent support, teacher engagement, economic stability, and social comfort.

Suspensions and other disciplinary data are other sources of information about school climate. These data should be analyzed to identify negative behavior patterns and opportunities for improvement. The analysis should examine whether schools are consistent in their treatment of students and in consequences for specific behavior. More important, data should be studied for cause-and-effect relationships. Determining the conditions that are most likely to generate disruptive or dangerous behavior is the first step in preventing or reducing those conditions and, ultimately, altering the climate of the school.

Examine the capacity to provide special programs.

Public schools are expected to be all things to all students. Students are to be treated equitably, but too often, equitable treatment is translated to mean equal treatment. Equity is not always equality. In determining the proper educational "fit" for students, one size will not fit all. A lockstep learning environment may cause some students to fall out of step and not regain their footing. The classroom teacher who recognizes and accommodates differences in student learning styles and pace creates a nurturing learning environment. Such a learning environment allows each child to thrive and grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

Even in a classroom with a positive learning environment, however, some students may need supplemental or alternative settings in order to be successful. A school district's capacity to provide appropriate programs is another measure of climate.

School boards should know specifically where and how the district provides for students with special needs. Such students include but are not limited to students with disabilities, gifted and talented students, students with limited English proficiency, students in poverty, transient students, and students whose learning has been interrupted. A district's capacity to identify and serve these students as well as the regular students demonstrates the district's commitment to creating a caring climate and a positive learning environment.

Survey parents and students to determine satisfaction levels.

Much of school climate is a reflection of perceptions and feelings. If you really want to know what people feel about their schools, ask them. Some school districts have developed satisfaction surveys modeled after customer satisfaction surveys used in business. They view their parents as clients and seek to please them. Questions are designed to seek information about attitudes, perceptions, and personal opinions. The district can then compare these perspectives to student achievement results to determine their correlation with success.

Build a positive culture within the organization.

The staff members who work in the schools and the district office play an important role in determining climate. Relationships built on trust and mutual respect among staff members—and between the staff and the board—help shape a workforce with strong commitment to the district and to its vision.

Climate is a manifestation of an organization's culture, which drives how people communicate, interact, and solve problems. The culture and climate in most organizations is set at the top. A positive climate results from leadership that appreciates and publicly values the role that each person in the organization plays.

One organizational strategy that places clear value on the individual is employee empowerment. Leaders who have faith in their own ability to select, train, and evaluate high-quality employees respect those employees by ensuring that decisions are made as close as possible to the point of implementation. This means that the person doing the job can decide, within the policies and standards of the organization, the best way to do it. This empowerment is a powerful motivator because it results in shared ownership of results. Empowered employees actively share the organization's vision; they bring commitment and creativity to the job; and they welcome accountability.

The way board members interact with the superintendent or other senior staff members sends a message about the value of staff in the eyes of the board. The way board members treat each other also influences the staff's perceptions and attitudes, with a consequent impact on workplace climate. Because that workplace is usually a school, board members' relationship skills and behaviors ultimately have an influence on the classroom environment and on student learning.

In addition, board members influence climate and morale more directly by carrying out such responsibilities as negotiating agreements and developing employee discipline policies. While these activities are to some degree inherently adversarial, many boards have developed relationships and procedures that include extensive input from staff, open dialogue on the issues, and decision-making processes that are based on pre-established and mutually agreed on principles and policies. Certainly, boards must sometimes make difficult decisions that even a majority of employees may disagree with. But if the board has built a long-term relationship of trust and follows its own openly developed procedures, it can retain the respect of employees and the positive climate that flows from that respect even in disagreement.

> *"Empowered employees actively share the organization's vision; they bring commitment and creativity to the job; and they welcome accountability."*

Positive relationships do not happen without a substantial and continued investment in skill building. For too long, teaching has been treated as a private act. Teachers develop wonderful skills in working with students but not with other teachers. First, they have few opportunities to do so, and the opportunities that they do have are scattered, fragmented, and squeezed into the hours before or after the students' day. Boards need to pay attention to staff development. Teachers need to understand the value of teamwork and mutual respect, develop the skills to practice them, and have the time to put those skills into action.

Survey staff to determine satisfaction levels.

Just as you examine attitudes of parents and students, you should also survey staff members to find out what they think and feel about their work and their work environment. The only way some boards gauge employee satisfaction is in communications with the employee organizations that represent them. While those interactions are integral to the running of a school district, additional information can be very helpful. School districts are organizations of intense human resources. What are the perceptions of the people who make up the organization? Do they share a sense of ownership for the shared vision? Are they proud of the work they do? Do they have ideas for improving that work? Are they proud of the organization and committed to its success? Gathering and analyzing such data can give district leaders a sense of the "state of the organization" as well as direction for change.

Communicate with the media.

Public confidence is another way of gauging school and district climate. Parents form their opinions based on first-hand experience with their child's school. In most communities, however, a great majority of the citizens do not have children currently enrolled in public schools. For these members of the community, their perspectives are primarily the result of second-hand information. A major source for that information is the local media. School district leaders cannot control the media, nor should they try. A mistake that school leaders do make, however, is to ignore the media and to underestimate their influence on the broader community.

Tendencies to avoid media contacts are strongest when school leaders are dealing with "bad news." Remember the old adage: If you have bad news, tell it quickly. Open communication from school boards and school leaders enhances the chance for including positive information along with bad news. In the absence of information from school leaders, reporters will seek other sources, usually within the organization. These sources may not have accurate information, or they may bring a negative perspective. Many members of the public forms their perceptions of the schools on this basis. And, in the case of climate, perceptions can become reality.

Make schools inviting places to be.

Schools belong to the community. Indeed, in many cases, the schools virtually define the community. Schools are not always welcoming places for students or their parents, however. First impressions can be lasting. The message begins at the front door. Signs such as "No Visitors" or even "Visitors must report directly to the main office" set a cold tone. Certainly, schools want all visitors to check into the office for security purposes. A sign that says, "Welcome. Please come first to the main office for a visitor pass or assistance," accomplishes the same security goal and extends an invitation at the same time.

The front desk of the main office is another measure of the climate of the school. Prompt attention to visitors, assisting them with a friendly smile and a helpful attitude, will reassure parents that their child's school is a positive environment. But if visitors are made to wait and are treated abruptly or with indifference, they will be offended and concerned for their children.

The true measure of invitation extends beyond the first impressions. The role that parents and other community members are invited to play contributes greatly to the overall school climate. Traditional community involvement such as baking cookies for school fund-raisers or other peripheral activities is not sufficient. Volunteering can be a rewarding and productive opportunity for community members, but many parents want more. They want to participate in planning and sharing responsibility for improving student achievement. In short, they want a seat at the table. Schools that build true partnerships with their parents create a welcoming shared climate.

Climate Self-Assessment

Use this tool to assess your initial understanding of climate and to get a sense of where you are as a board on this key action. Indicate the degree to which your board/district has achieved the following elements in establishing a positive climate for student achievement

	Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Beginning to Achieve
We model the core values and beliefs of our shared vision in our work as a school board.				
We provide a policy framework that is built on trust and mutual respect between the board and the staff.				
We survey parents and students regularly to determine client satisfaction with our school district.				
We align staff authority and responsibility so that decisions are made at the level closest to implementation.				
We foster a culture that promotes the highest expectations for achievement for all students.				
We create a climate that values and celebrates student achievement as the top priority of the district.				
We encourage staff to risk failure as well as success as part of the continuing challenge to improve student achievement.				
We encourage students to take risks by enrolling in more challenging courses				
We have clear policies that establish safe schools and promote orderly, positive learning environments				
We maintain school facilities that are designed and equipped to promote the highest student achievement for all students.				

Climate Questions the School Board Should Ask Itself

- Do district policies allow for flexibility at the school and classroom levels? Does the school board avoid micromanagement?
- Does the district have the flexibility it needs to foster student achievement ? Are there state and federal regulations that hinder student achievement initiatives?
- Do we regularly make student achievement a part of our meeting agenda?
- Do the school board, administrators, and staff model mutual respect, professional behavior, and a commitment to continuous learning?
- Do school board policies hold staff and students to high behavioral standards? Are there clear and consistent consequences for those who violate policies?
- Is the school board a vocal advocate for student achievement issues among local, state, and federal policymakers?
- Are school facilities adequate and designed to promote a sense of community—smaller schools, schools within schools?

Climate Questions the School Board Should Ask the Superintendent and Staff

- How is climate assessed?
- What do students, teachers, parents, and other community members think about the climate in district schools?
- Are data collected on student discipline incidents?
- What are we doing to create a safe and positive learning environment?
- What can the board do to help staff members feel more in control of their jobs?
- How do we promote understanding, commitment, and accountability to others?
- Do teachers have the time and resources to achieve standards?
- How do we recognize outstanding staff and student performance?
- What are the avenues for two-way communication and are they adequate?

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Climate	
The school board	The superintendent
1. Fosters a culture supporting the belief that all children can learn at higher levels by: • employing and supporting a superintendent who shares that philosophy • developing and revising policies to reflect that philosophy.	1a. Ensures employment of qualified staff. 1b. Ensures a staff evaluation process that supports student achievement goals. 1c. Recommends assistance for staff not meeting evaluation criteria, followed by dismissal recommendations if necessary. 1d. Develops and revises policies to meet student achievement goals and to ensure recruitment and retention of qualified staff.
2. Approves and monitors programs designed to meet special instructional needs of students who are not meeting achievement goals or standards.	2a. Recommends instructional programs or approaches for special instructional needs based on data and best practices. 2b. Provides updates to the board on these special programs. 2c. Institutes a process for evaluating these programs and recommends needed changes to the board.
3. Provides adequate resources to meet student achievement goals through the budgeting process and monitors the budget regularly.	3a. Communicates with the board about resources needed to meet student achievement goals before developing the budget. 3b. Develops the budget based on student achievement goals and discussion with staff and key community groups. 3c. Recommends the budget to the board. 3d. Reports monthly on budget implementation and allocation of resources.
4. Recognizes and rewards staff and students for high academic achievement and high levels of improvement.	4a. Develops and recommends to the board a plan for regular recognition of students and staff. 4b. Carries out recognition programs.
5. Conducts all board meetings with student achievement as a clear focus.	5a. Works with board chairman to develop a board agenda with a focus on student achievement. 5b. Coordinates staff presentations for board meetings.
6. Models respect, professional behavior, and a commitment to continuous learning • with fellow board members • with superintendent and staff • with parents and students • with the community.	6a. Models respect, professional behavior and a commitment to continuous learning • with board members • with staff • with parents and students • with the community.
7. Serves as advocates for higher student achievement in the community and also at the state and federal levels.	7a. Serves as an advocate for higher student achievement with the staff and the community. 7b. Works with the board to provide information needed for understanding and communicating student achievement goals to the community. 7c. Serves as an advocate for higher student achievement with state and federal officials.

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Climate (Continued)	
The school board	The superintendent
8. Provides orientation for board candidates and for new board members on expectations for student achievement.	8a. Works with the board to develop an orientation model for board candidates and new board members.
9. Ensures periodic assessment of school climate throughout the district using ▸ attendance data ▸ discipline data ▸ surveys of students, staff, and parents ▸ enrollment in higher-level classes ▸ staff turnover ▸ student enrollment trends.	9a. Identifies and implements surveys or other means of assessing the school climate for high student achievement. 9b. Collects, compiles, and analyzes data related to school climate. 9c. Reports periodically to the board on the results of school climate assessments and data trends and recommends changes. 9d. Ensures that appropriate changes are made. 9e. Recommends additional policies or policy revisions.
10. Ensures a safe and orderly learning environment in all schools.	10a. Works with the board to develop appropriate policies and revise them as needed. 10b. Ensures that actions are taken to implement board policies. 10c. Reports periodically to the board on issues related to school safety. 10d. Makes changes as necessary. 10e. Makes recommendations for board action as indicated by need. 10f. Collaborates with other community officials, organizations, and groups to review and update district safety and emergency management plans. 10g. Ensures staff training on appropriate safety and emergency measures at each building.
11. Builds public support for higher student achievement and increases public trust of the district through formal and informal communication and through openness. 1a. Develops a plan for recruiting and retaining qualified staff.	11a. Works with board, staff, and community in an open, positive manner. 11b. Implements a district communication plan that ensures accurate information, regular channels for community involvement and input, and attention to customer service throughout the district. 11c. Ensures openness by district staff in relations with all stakeholders.

Planning Team Considerations for a Positive Climate for Student Achievement

1. How can we identify the data that are available to gauge climate in our schools?
2. How will we get feedback from key school district constituents regarding school climate?
3. What can we do to prepare our schools to respond to the feedback they get regarding climate?
4. How can we examine our capacity to serve special populations successfully?
5. How can we promote agreement on the ground rules for the way our board and senior staff should interact with each other and with other staff?
6. How can we promote mentoring and induction programs for new staff, students, and parents to help develop a positive climate districtwide?
7. How can we assess whether we have positive communications with the media?

Resources on Climate

Black, Susan. "Creating Community." *American School Board Journal*, June 1997, pp. 32-35.

The concepts of school climate and school culture are different. While culture includes climate, climate does not encompass all aspects of culture. This article presents research on transforming both school culture and school climate to enhance student achievement. A list of selected references is included. An executive summary of the article is available at *http://www.asbj.com/199706/asbj0697.html*.

Freiberg, H. Jerome. "Measuring School Climate: Let Me Count the Ways." *Educational Leadership*, September 1998, pp. 22-26.

School climate can be a positive influence on the health of the learning environment or a significant barrier to learning. Thus, feedback about school climate can play an important role in school reform and improvement efforts. The elements that make up school climate are complex, and there are many ways to measure it. This article describes how schools used three measuring instruments—student concern surveys, entrance and exit interviews, and ambient noise checklists—to measure school climate and act on the findings to make significant, healthy changes.

"Leadership for Student Achievement: Ford Foundation 5 Meet." *Updating School Board Policies*, September 1999, pp. 5-7.

This article describes a program through which labor and management representatives from public school districts in Boston, Chicago, New Orleans, St. Louis and San Francisco are participating in a multi-year project funded by a Ford Foundation grant to improve student achievement through effective labor-management partnerships and teams.
Full text is available to National Affiliate members through *http://www.nsba.org/na/private/index.htm*.

Mustaro, Vincent A. "A Policy Perspective on School Violence." *Updating School Board Policies*, June/July 1999, pp. 1-2.

School boards must address violence in schools before it occurs. A number of key policy areas should be reviewed and addressed in board efforts to combat violence. These include discipline, training in violence prevention, school security, weapons, maintenance of public order on school property, and others. Full text is available at *http://www.nsba.org/nepn/newsletter/799.htm*.

Ngeow, Karen. "Online Resources for Parent/Family Involvement. *ERIC Digest*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, 1999. 4 pp.

Research has shown with certainty that the more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement. Home learning activities are a crucial part of parents' involvement in their children's education. Based on reviews of the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement and the literature on parent-school involvement, the author has identified five goals for parent involvement ventures. For each goal, there is a description of online resources that can help parents and educators attain them. Full text is available at *http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed432775.html*.

Olson, Lynn. "Worries of a Standards 'Backlash' Grow." *Education Week*, April 5, 2000, pp. 1, 12-13.
As standards-based reform proceeds around the country, its uneven and sometimes careless implementation has led even some of its main proponents to worry about the gap between theory and practice. And as some states move from paper to practice, they have raised the ire of parents, educators, and students, who either disagree with the premise behind standards-based reform or have found plenty to protest in its implementation. This article discusses the perspectives of critics as well as supporters of the standards movement. Full text is available through *http://www.edweek.com/edsearch.cfm*: type the article title in the search box and click on Get Results.

Royal, Mark A. and Robert J. Rossi. "Schools as Communities." *ERIC Digest number 111*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, March 1997. 2 pp.

School leaders are paying increased attention to the quality of the relationships that exist among staff members and students in schools. Evidence suggests that a strong sense of community in schools has specific benefits for both staff members and students, and it also provides a necessary foundation for school improvement. This digest provides summary information on the elements of community in schools, the effects on staff members and students, the factors that affect community, and the relationship of community to other improvement activities. Full text is available at *http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed405641.html*.

U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice. *Safeguarding Our Children: An Action Guide*. April 2000. 61 pp.

This new joint publication follows up on the 1998 Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools, which featured research-based practices designed to help school communities identify warning signs early and develop prevention, intervention, and crisis response plans (full text at http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/earlywrn.html). The new action guide is designed to help schools develop and implement a comprehensive violence prevention plan grounded in the principles of the early warning guide. It emphasizes early intervention and prevention and the importance of teamwork among educators, mental health professionals, parents, and students. Full text is available at *http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/ActionGuide/*.

A Profile of Community Engagement in Climate

St. Louis Park, Minnesota

The St. Louis Park Public Schools, a small suburban district just west of Minneapolis, has often been a school system ahead of its time. At least a decade before the adage, "It takes a village to raise a child" became a commonly accepted educational philosophy, this district was deeply involved in community engagement. In the late 1970s, the district began a "visioning" process called "Project 85" that intended to position St. Louis Park to respond to the future—a future that would see enrollment decline from 11,000 students to a smaller but more culturally diverse student body of 4,600 students, about a fifth of whom qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

After Project 85, which involved hundreds of residents in focus groups, task forces, and large group planning, had laid the groundwork for future plans, Superintendent Carl Holmstrom intensified the public's involvement in the schools during his tenure from 1985 to 1996. The district developed a five-year strategic plan and pioneered the "Village Goes to School" day, inviting the entire community to school to share ideas on education. In 1992, St. Louis Park became the first community in the nation to fund a "Children First" initiative, based on research, that asked all individuals and organizations to put children first as they made decisions and took actions. And the school district has always taken its responsibility to educate the entire community very seriously, offering classes and instruction for all ages. "We are a life-long learning district, from the sand box to the pine box," says Bridget Gothberg, the district's community education director.

With a strong history of community involvement and support behind it, the district moved steadily toward its next phase: developing a new five-year strategic plan aimed at making a very good school district even better. Last December, under the direction of Superintendent Barbara Pulliam, the district embarked on an extensive planning process. It used the Bill Cook model, a national planning model that the superintendent had found effective and believed would give the district the specific direction it needed as it entered the new millennium. In designing the strategic planning process, school leaders believed it was important to make sure the planning team was representative of the entire school district community.

In June 1999, the strategic planning team reconvened to review the action plans, incorporate them into the draft strategic plan, and forward the overall plan to the board of education for adoption. In July, says Gothberg, the board adopted its new strategic plan, which has the following objectives:

- Every child will enter kindergarten ready to learn.
- Each student will annually set, pursue, and review challenging educational goals that stretch him/her to the limit of his/her capabilities.
- 100 percent of students will meet or exceed district standards in the core curriculum in grades three, five, eight, and 10/11.
- 100 percent of students will graduate.

For many other school districts, those goals might seem lofty or even unattainable. But St. Louis Park already had a strong record of achievement: It was the only school district in Minnesota to have all of its schools recognized as "Blue Ribbon" schools, or National Schools of Excellence, by the U.S. Department of Education. Criteria include academic performance, strong teaching and curriculum, discipline, and parent involvement. Educators from all over the state have come to observe the district's whole- language program, which encourages reading and integrates reading, writing, speaking, and listening from kindergarten through elementary school. And the district, a recognized leader in technology, was one of the first school districts in the nation to have every classroom linked to one another and to worldwide resources.

> *"The school district has always taken its responsibility to educate the entire community very seriously, offering classes and instruction for all ages."*

To meet its objectives, the district decided it would have to take a critical look at itself in eight key areas, ranging from aligning curriculum and ensuring that staff are using the best teaching methods to improving public perceptions of the schools. Although the district developed basic strategies to meet its goals, it expects to involve hundreds of citizens in action teams to further refine and implement these strategies. For example, says Gothberg, the district has instituted many wonderful programs over the years but has no system in place

to evaluate and drop programs that are no longer useful. Instead of adding on to what already exists, a group will develop a system to review existing programs and determine whether they are outdated or duplicative. The district will keep asking itself a difficult question: "Why are we still doing this?"

According to the strategic plan's guidelines, no new service or program will be accepted unless it is consistent with the strategic plan, unless benefits justify costs, and unless provisions are made for staff development and program evaluation. No existing program or service will be retained unless benefits justify cost and unless the program contributes to the district's mission: "As a caring, diverse community with a tradition of putting its children first, we will ensure that all students attain the highest level of achievement and become contributing members of society, and we will offer everyone high-quality opportunities for lifelong learning, by providing multiple pathways to excellence and challenging each learner to meet high standards, within a safe environment."

In technology, for example, St. Louis Park has found that being on the cutting edge is no longer enough. Thus, the district's technology strategy will be to focus on making the best use of technology as a teaching tool and as a student data management system. District teams will write a comprehensive information literacy skills curriculum for grades K-12, find ways to allow community members to access the district's information and resources electronically, and ensure that all staff members have the necessary technology skills to access, process, and communicate information in their work.

To ensure that all children enter kindergarten ready to learn, the district will need to reach out in ways it never had to before, breaking down barriers of isolation that still exist in a school district that is more culturally diverse than most in the region. One of the district's goals is to increase by 15 percent the participation of families in early childhood parenting classes and programs. Another is to develop curriculum for all district early childhood programming that provides a more seamless transition to kindergarten.

"We've developed some strategies and an action plan, but now we have to carry it out," says Gothberg. "Now we'll get our hands dirty."

The school district will continue to build on its history of shared decision making. Each elementary school has a site council, which focuses on making data-driven decisions to improve student achievement. Each site council is autonomous and decides how to choose its own members, but each must have a balance of teachers and parents. The junior and senior high schools have parent advisory councils, and the community education division has a representative citizen advisory council. The councils have a say in areas such as interviewing and hiring new staff and in making budget decisions. The councils also recruited parents to complete the numerous forms necessary to apply for Blue Ribbon school status. In addition, ad hoc committees are convened frequently on current issues. For example, a Citizens' Financial Advisory Committee met this year to assess the district's financial status and to recommend fund balance guidelines to the board. A Transportation Advisory Committee is also assisting the business office in reviewing the current status of school buses.

St. Louis Park will continue to build on its innovative "Children First" Initiative, the communitywide partnership that works to strengthen families and to create a more caring community environment for children and youth. A philosophy rather than a program, it first started in 1992, when Carl Holmstrom, then superintendent, challenged the Rotary Club to do something for children. The business community responded with interest and initial funding. The initiative, supported by research, is based on building "assets" for healthy youth—family support, parental discipline and standards, structured use of time, positive values, educational commitments, and social competence. The more assets young people have, the more likely they are to do well in school and in the community, and the less likely they are to engage in drug and alcohol use and other negative behaviors. The school district, the city, businesses, health and social service agencies, the religious community, and individuals are all called upon to "reclaim their responsibility for young people and provide the guidance, support, and attention young people need to be successful." For example, a local church offers a free, after-school program for 40 elementary school students, and a local florist gives children in a low-income housing complex flowers to give to their mothers on Mother's Day. To support the Children First initiative, the district's Web site also suggests ways in which parents, businesses, and organizations can become involved. "Look at your business policies and consider them in light of what will support families and their children," it suggests. "If you employ teens, consider ways you can support their positive development."

For more information, contact Bridget Gothberg, community education director, St. Louis Park Public Schools, at (612) 928-6063 or (612) 928-6064. The district's Web site is at *http://www.stlpark.k12.mn.us*.

This profile is excerpted from *The Community Connection: Case Studies in Public Engagement*, by Anne Wright and Judith Brody Saks. Published by the National School Boards Association, 2000.

chapter 8
Collaboration

Creating collaboration means bringing people together to solve common problems. Collaboration requires a level of trust and confidence in the relationship that allows individuals to work together to achieve a greater good. In education, many of the issues we face are so complex that individuals acting independently usually cannot resolve them; neither can boards of education working in isolation.

The primary challenge facing public education is improving the achievement of all students—a challenge so complex it requires a paradigm shift. Thirty years ago it was expected that 25 percent of students would complete algebra in preparation for college. Today, knowledge of algebra is an expectation for all students. In the past, public schools spent a good deal of time sorting students according to ability as measured by test scores. Students were labeled college bound, non-college bound, and vocational and were provided programs appropriate for those areas. In the Industrial Age, that process seemed to work, and few questioned its efficacy. Today, as a precondition for success in the workplace, all students must master many of the skills and much of the knowledge once reserved for college-bound students.

If raising student achievement were easy to do, we would have already done it. We know a great deal more today about how students learn than we did 30 years ago. We have developed better teaching methods, and we have a more skilled teacher corps than we had 30 years ago. If these were enough, improving student achievement would now fall under the "problem solved" category. We all know that it does not. Complex challenges do not have ready solutions—they represent uncharted territory, and employing past practices cannot solve them. Recall the adage, "If we always do what we've always done, we'll always get what we always got." In fact, the most effective way to solve a complex challenge is to bring multiple perspectives and experiences to bear on it. Put another way, complex challenges are best solved through collaboration. When collaboration is in play, it engenders mutual ownership of the problem as well as the solution.

A major role of leaders in solving complex challenges is to build collaborative relationships, but that is easier said than done. Some consider collaboration an unnatural act performed by unconsenting adults. Certainly, collaboration is difficult, because it requires going beyond simply sharing knowledge and information. Collaboration is more than a relationship that helps each party achieve its own goals. As David Chrislip and Carl Larson wrote in their 1994 book *Collaborative Leadership*, "The purpose of collaboration is to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party."

Educational leaders cannot hope to create and sustain high student performance working alone. School boards and school district leaders must build networks of collaborative relationships that bring key stakeholders into the deliberative process to solve the complex challenges facing public education.

Effective school boards have long recognized that the nature of public schooling's impact on the community gives everyone in that community an interest in the success of schools. While parents of students have an immediate interest in school quality and school operations, other community members also have a literal stake in the schools. This stake comes in the form of both the investments community members make through their taxes and the need they recognize for a well-educated cadre of young people who will become successful, contributing members of society.

School boards that involve the broader citizenry through effective community engagement activities have had great success in garnering broad support for necessary school funding, even in difficult financial times. But beyond the financial support that community engagement can generate, community collaboration brings into schooling additional social, emotional, and experiential resources that can raise student achievement to heights unattainable through instruction alone.

Who are the necessary partners in collaboration for student achievement in the 21st century?

Certainly parents are essential partners for their children's education. Every school district recognizes the importance of supportive and involved parents. Successful school districts also realize that there are many other players who need to be invited into the collaboration arena. First among them are the students themselves. They are not merely our products—they

are our clients. Students who are active partners in their education are much more likely to achieve success.

Beyond parents and students is a wide range of possible partnerships. While every citizen in the community is a potential collaborative partner, successful school districts have made special efforts to build relationships with both business and political leaders. Both of these potential partners have strong influences in the resources and regulations that control schools. And both have significant interest in schools' success.

Parents. Two truisms are worth repeating in this context. The first is that the parent is the child's first teacher. The second is that it takes a community to educate a child. Parent engagement is key to effective collaboration between the school and the community. Parents need to feel that their voices are heard and their input valued. Significant long-term efforts to improve student achievement cannot be sustained without parental understanding and support. When parents have high expectations for their children, those children are more likely to have high expectations for themselves. When parents believe in the educational goals and performance standards of the district, they will become invaluable allies at every level of public discourse.

To build collaborative relationships with parents requires meaningful roles for parents that go beyond helping out in the media center, baking for cookie sales, and chaperoning field trips. Assisting with learning activities both at home and in the classroom, tutoring students in need of additional support, and helping prepare instructional materials can contribute directly to improving student achievement. Traditionally, we have not been very good at encouraging the kind of substantive involvement that collaboration requires. And yet, parents, as much as any group, have the greatest investment in education.

Students. It is a curious fact that most school systems do very little if anything to find out what students appreciate or do not appreciate about their school experience. For the most part, we simply do not know. This lack of client information stands in stark contrast to the approach used by most successful for-profit and not-for-profit enterprises. Students have the greatest personal stake in the quality of education, and their performance is the ultimate test of a school district's effectiveness. School districts that muffle their voices miss a golden opportunity to enhance programs and services.

Collaborating with students requires finding out what they need and want and helping them realize their learning goals and career aspirations. It does not mean turning the "store" over to the customers. It does mean providing meaningful opportunities for engagement. Students need to believe that schools exist to enable them to learn and increase their competence rather than to inoculate them with an "academic vaccination." When students understand that learning is something they do—not something that is done to them—they take greater responsibility for themselves.

Business leaders. Effective boards and superintendents encourage and welcome the participation of business in school district processes, such as vision and standards setting, assessment, and accountability. The involvement of local business leaders strengthens the systematic planning process inherent in the Key Work of School Boards because it adds both expertise and credibility.

Boards also solicit key leaders in the business community to take active roles on district committees and advisory boards. While many board members themselves are successful businesspersons, they benefit from another perspective on district issues and processes. These boards ask community volunteers to review school system operations in which the volunteers have particular expertise, and they pay attention to what the advisors tell them. One of the principles of effective communication is not to ask for feedback unless you are prepared to act on it. Nothing is more frustrating or alienating to citizens than to be asked to participate and then to be ignored. Acting on the advice and recommendation of stakeholders does not always require agreement, but it does require an honest brokering of the recommendations received. And it requires openness on the part of the school district to reexamine its practices in light of the expert advice of business partners committed to collaboration.

Other members of the community—including those in such professions as medicine, law, agriculture, manufacturing, ranching, construction trades, and every other field of expertise—also have something to offer to school districts. Opening the doors and meeting rooms of a school system and providing all of the citizens an opportunity to participate brings an enormous wealth of experiences and perspectives that can be used to improve both the quality of school operations and the richness of students' learning experiences.

Community political leaders. Most school board members are elected political leaders themselves, but other locally elected leaders also have a strong interest and a large stake in schools. Some political leaders directly control the resources needed by schools, while others have the power to pass legislation impacting directly on school operations.

Successful school boards build collaborative relationships with these political leaders through a variety of strategies. They also strive to keep the political leaders well informed not only about school system policy and program changes, but also about the academic improvements that result from those changes.

Because state legislatures—frequently with prodding from the governor—have been active in setting statewide standards in recent years, school boards should make every effort to keep legislators informed about their own initiatives to raise student achievement. Preserving effective local school district autonomy starts with demonstrating to those who would preempt it that the school board is doing an effective job in setting and meeting high standards for student performance.

Political leaders should never be forced to rely on the media to learn about the public schools in their jurisdictions. An effective school board makes it its business to communicate regularly and thoroughly with all political leaders associated with its district. It keeps them informed about accountability data that it collects, and it invites them in for discussions and analyses of district strengths and focus areas for improvement. Smart school districts also recognize publicly the political leaders who contribute to school success through effective legislation and through additional resources.

Political leaders can collaborate with school districts to enhance the instructional program by providing experiential learning in civics- and government-related courses at every grade level. Students' first-hand experiences with political leaders and political processes also increase the politicians' awareness of the positive things going on in schools. Such collaboration extends the relationships begun through board member's outreach for collaboration and it builds stronger advocates for public schools among some of the most influential persons in the community.

"Political leaders should never be forced to rely on the media to learn about the public schools in their jurisdictions."

How does a board of education go about building collaborative relationships?

There is no formula or ready prescription for doing so, but there are practical steps that can help to jump start or strengthen the process.

- **Model collaboration for others.** Values in an organization define what we will and will not do to accomplish our goals and the way we expect to treat others and ourselves in the process. Collaborative relationships are based on trust and the respectful treatment of others. Boards must model the kind of relationships they seek to build. Having regular board retreats with skilled facilitators can help the board focus on its own working relationships, ground rules, and values. In the last analysis, what we do is far more persuasive than what we say.
- **Invest in relationship building.** Collaborative relationships rarely emerge spontaneously except in emergencies. Because we assume, incorrectly, that relationships can be established just by putting people together in groups to solve problems and carry out tasks, we almost never spend time thinking about the group itself and how a group of individuals becomes an effective team. Collaborative relationships must be cultivated in a deliberative and purposeful way. Team-building activities conducted by skilled trainers help a group build trust and develop effective ways of communicating together. For boards, retreats and other reflective sessions can serve this purpose. For others, community and staff, similar opportunities need to be planned and provided.

  Teacher preparation programs give little attention to interpersonal dynamics, and teachers have few opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers. It is assumed, however, that given the opportunity to collaborate, they will. In America, teaching has been structured largely as a private act that individuals perform alone in classrooms separated by walls and corridors. Fostering the norm of collegiality among teachers and principals will not happen simply because we will it. Taking time along the way to invest and reinvest in building relationships is key to long-term success.
- **Invite others to the table.** Engaging the community is essential work for school boards. Too many

citizens (and parents) feel alienated from the schools, either because they have no children in the schools, or they have heard negative things about the schools, or they have not had positive experiences with the schools. Many of these same individuals are community leaders who influence the opinions of others. The board needs to find ways to bring these people to the table to engage them in discussions about the schools and enlist them in helping to craft a vision for the future. Being invited to the table does not mean being invited to testify or react to proposals already on the table; being invited to the table means being enlisted to help solve complex challenges.

- **Focus on the things that unite rather than those that divide.** Building collaborative relationships requires finding common ground and creating opportunities to work together to accomplish mutually beneficial goals. In the last analysis, if we make time for dialogue and exploration, we will find that we agree more than we disagree. Too often we spend most of our time focusing on areas of disagreement, thereby giving up valuable opportunities to collaborate and solve mutual problems. Finding common ground often requires reframing an issue. For example, local boards of education are being challenged to focus as never before on student achievement. A significant body of research confirms what most of us believe intuitively: when it comes to student achievement, the quality of teachers is key. Skilled teachers consistently lead students to higher levels of achievement. Poor teachers create the opposite effect. What would happen if boards and teachers came together and worked collaboratively to develop plans for improving student achievement? Instead of seeing teachers as the problem, boards would reach out to teachers and enable them to be part of the solution. Instead of fixing the blame, the board would fix the problem. The same point can be made about relationships with political and other community leaders.

Collaborative relationships require time and attention to cultivate and maintain. School boards that seek consciously to build such relationships by inviting others to the table, investing in the process of reflection and skill building, and modeling what the board expects of others can lead from a position of extraordinary strength. Influence is built on relationships; relationships are everything.

Collaboration Self-Assessment

Use this tool to assess your initial understanding of collaboration and also to get a sense of where you are as a board on this key action. Indicate the degree to which your board/district has achieved the following elements of collaborative relationships for improving student achievement.

	Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Beginning to Achieve
We as board members understand that collaboration begins with us.				
We treat each other, the superintendent, staff, students, parents, and community members with mutual respect.				
We take time to reflect on and improve our own internal and external relationships.				
We view our communication with staff and the community as a two-way process.				
We provide opportunities for community input into key actions of the board.				
Our priorities and student performance standards reflect community needs and interest.				
We build partnerships with the business community and others that promote high student achievement as the top priority.				
We support staff efforts to build collaborative relationships with other agencies (e.g., social services, police, juvenile justice) to provide child- and family- centered services.				
We recognize, as a board, that our leadership responsibilities extend beyond the district to include state and national issues.				
We communicate regularly with other elected officials to promote public schools that maintain student achievement for all students as their top priority.				

Questions the School Board Should Ask Itself

- Do we provide leadership and take an active role in establishing collaborative relationships?
- What alliances and collaborations would most advance student achievement goals and objectives—teachers, teacher unions, social service agencies, colleges and universities, businesses?
- How can collaborative relationships be built and sustained?
- What are appropriate levels of stakeholder involvement?
- Is the community engaged in student achievement plans and initiatives at the district and school levels through surveys, forums, meetings, committees, and school-based management councils?
- Is the community well informed about the district's vision, achievements, difficulties, and plans for improvement?

Questions the School Board Should Ask the Superintendent and Staff

- What collaborative initiatives are currently in place, what are their purposes, and who are the participants?
- What efforts are made to collaborate with groups with whom the district differs?
- Is there adequate outreach to various government agencies, education associations, and universities to keep current on education issues?
- How many outreach and student achievement speaking opportunities are on the events calendar?
- How does the district relate to the media?
- How are collaborative and engagement initiatives managed? What is the definition of appropriate roles, responsibilities, expectations, and decision-making parameters?

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Collaboration	
The school board	The superintendent
1. Fosters collaborative relationships as a board philosophy in • strategic planning • community vision • instructional improvements.	1a. Encourages the board and staff to involve key stakeholders in appropriate decision making both at the district and at the school level.
2. Approves and periodically reviews a district plan to build collaborative relationships with key stakeholders at all levels based on gaining support for student achievement as the district's top priority.	2a. Recommends to the board a plan to build these collaborative relationships, leads a periodic review of progress, and implements agreed-to strategies for improved relationships. 2b. Keeps the board and others informed about the district's progress and solicits appropriate input for areas of concern.
3. Models collaboration and trust.	3a. Works with the board to determine a process for periodic review of the leadership team's relationship and vision. 3b. Implements changes recommended through the periodic review.
4. Advocates district positions on educational issues with legislators and other state and local political leaders and keeps abreast of other state and national issues.	4a. Assists the board in its advocacy efforts with public officials by arranging meetings, providing needed data and information, and scheduling other activities as needed.
5. Advocates student achievement as a top community priority.	5a. Provides data and relevant materials to assist the board in its advocacy role. 5b. Teams with board members to speak to groups within the community.
6. Ensures a climate of open communications at board meetings and throughout the district.	6a. Ensures a climate of open communications, both internally and externally. 6b. Recommends additional policies or policy revisions.
7. Provides funding and resources for collaborative efforts. 1a. Follows a collaborative approach in working with the board.	7a. Presents budget recommendations needed to support collaborative efforts and initiatives.

Planning Team Considerations for Developing a Plan for Collaboration:

1. What process should we use to identify the key people in our community with whom the board and superintendent should strive for collaboration?
2. Are there clearly recognizable potential business partners in our community whom we should immediately involve in this process of building collaboration? What can we do about it?
3. How can we seek out nontraditional partners in our district?
4. How can we determine which political leaders are most favorable to our district, and how can we recognize their efforts?
5. How can we begin to build relationships and awareness with political leaders who are **not** favorable to our schools?
6. How can we build on what many of our teachers are already doing in creating partnerships in the community to enrich the instructional program?

Resources on Collaboration

Bryant, Anne L. "School Boards Use Baldrige Award Principles to Create Links to Business Community and Raise Student Achievement." *School Board News*, July 7, 1998, p. 2, 4.

The Baldrige system approach calls for a school district to work with all its stakeholders—educators, administrators, staff, parents, students, and the business community—to define a mission for the district and develop a plan for achieving it. The National Alliance of Business has customized the Baldrige principles for school districts. A set of criteria has been developed to help schools assess their performance and develop a plan for improvement. The criteria are organized around the categories of leadership, strategic planning, student and stakeholder focus, information and analysis, faculty and staff focus, educational and support process management, and student performance results. The Pinellas County School District in Florida has been working with its business partners to phase in this systemwide process since the early 1990s, and as a result student achievement levels have improved substantially. Unlike many other school improvement strategies that are imposed from the outside, the Baldrige system engages people from within the district. It empowers all the district's constituents to set common goals and act together to bring about change.

The Business Roundtable, *http://www.brtable.org*.

The Business Roundtable is a multinational association of chief executive officers of leading U.S. corporations. The CEOs examine public policy issues that affect the economy and develop positions that seek to reflect sound economic and social principles. In 1992 the Roundtable formed the Education Excellence Partnership (*http://www.edex.org*), a group of leading business, government, and education organizations dedicated to creating awareness of the need for education reform and to encouraging positive action toward reform on the state and community level. The Ad Council cooperates with this group to produce public service announcements designed to inspire parents, grandparents, teachers, students, and community leaders to support higher academic standards and take action to improve education in their communities. The Business Roundtable has published "A Business Leader's Guide to Setting Academic Standards" and similar reports for business executives.

The Conference Board, *http://www.conferenceboard.org*.

The Conference Board is an international business membership and research network, linking executives from different companies, industries, and countries. Its twofold purpose is to improve the business enterprise system and to enhance the contribution of business to society. The Conference Board publishes reports related to workplace skills and educational improvement.

Murnane, Richard J. and Frank Levy. "The New Basics." *American School Board Journal*, April 1997, pp. 26-29.

Schools can do a better job of providing all students with the six New Basic Skills for today's economy by working with high-performance firms to improve schools. The article gives examples of how business and school-business partnerships have helped schools improve. A summary of the article is available at *http://www.asbj.com/199704/asbj0497.html*.

National Alliance of Business, *http://www.nab.com*.

The National Alliance of Business is a national business organization focused on increasing student achievement and improving the competitiveness of the workforce. Its 5,000 members include Fortune 500 companies, their CEOs and senior executives, educators, and business-led coalitions. It serves as the business community's arm for action in public policies related to the quality of the American workforce. The National Alliance of Business and the American Productivity & Quality Center have formed BiE IN, the Baldrige in Education Initiative. This is a unique partnership of 26 leading business and education organizations dedicated to reforming the education system based on quality principles. Resources describing the Baldrige criteria and their application can be found at *http://www.nab.com/content/educationimprovement/qualitymanagement_baldrige/resources.htm*.

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, *http://pfie.ed.gov*.

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education aims to increase opportunities for families to be more involved in their children's learning at school and at home, and to use family-school-community partnerships to strengthen schools and improve student achievement. The Web site includes links to resources, events, and partner listings.

Powe, Karen W. "A Common Agenda." *American School Board Journal*, December 1996, pp. 32-35.

This article discusses the implications of a 1995 survey of business-education coalitions and summarizes specific things that each side of the partnership can do to enhance the probability of a productive partnership. Also includes a testimonial by a school board president and some examples of highly successful collaborations.

Ramping Up Reform in North Carolina; Aligning Education Rhetoric, Resolve and Results, Highlights. National Alliance of Business, 1999.

In 1997, the National Education Goals Panel reported that students from North Carolina and Texas had posted the greatest average gains in test scores as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress and state assessments from 1990 to 1997. This publication makes an effort to delve into the systemic factors that prompted the successful results in North Carolina, particularly the role played by the business community. Contains a summary of advice for business partners. Full text available at *http://www.nab.com/Content/AboutUs/Resources/pdf2.htm*.

Resnick, Michael A. *Communities Count: A School Board Guide to Public Engagement*. National School Boards Association, 2000. 33 pp.

This book emphasizes the need for public engagement and the leadership role of school boards in fostering it. Public officials, senior citizens, the media, civic leaders, community organizations, business leaders, and the university community some of the public component groups discussed. The book features how-to information, including specific techniques such as polling, focus groups, e-mail, and study circles. Case studies of organizational and state school board association successes are featured. The book is available from NSBA, (800) 706-6722); *http://www.nsba.org/resources.htm*.

Rubin, Hank. *Collaboration Skills for Educators and Nonprofit Leaders*. Lyceum Books, 1998. 105 pp.

This book provides extensive and specific guidance for leading the process of collaboration, defined as a purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to accomplish a shared outcome. It is the first in what is intended to be a series of studies of collaboration management by the author and his colleagues at the Institute for Collaborative Leadership. Chapters 1-4 of the book establish the broad contexts of collaborations and pose a variety of arguments in favor of collaboration; chapter 5 outlines a simple 12-step conceptual model of the points to be considered as collaborations are built and managed; chapter 6 provides a series of short essays exploring the wide range of characteristics and skills of collaborative leaders; and chapter 7 singles out a few of the essential characteristics of effective collaborative leaders. The book is available for $21.95 from Lyceum Books, 5758 S. Blackstone Ave., Chicago, IL 60637; (773) 643-1902; *lyceum3@ibm.net*. (A significant portion of proceeds from the sale of this book will be contributed to the Institute for Collaborative Leadership.)

U.S. Department of Education. *A Guide to Promising Practices in Educational Partnerships*, 1996, 76 pp. and Educational Partnerships Case Studies, 1996 (available online only).

The guide to promising practices (*http:www.ed.gov/pubs/PromPract/*) looks at practices that help build partnerships: needs assessments, strategic staffing, recruiting partners and volunteers. It examines the activities of 13 partnerships in terms of staff development, support service for students, school-to-work transition, and community involvement. The educational partnerships case studies (*http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Partners/index.html*) look at five types of partnerships (integrated services, storefront school, school-to-work, curriculum focused, and multifocus) in light of the context, the process of initiation and implementation, the degree of institutionalization, and the impact.

Profile of Collaborative Relationships

Long Beach, California

In 1992, the city of Long Beach, California, was at a critical crossroads. Its naval station and shipyard had closed. The McDonnell Douglas Company, a major employer, had downsized to nearly half its workforce, leaving 17,500 employees without jobs. Residents knew they had to act quickly. Arguing that education is an economic development issue, leaders of the Long Beach Unified School District and other educators took the lead in urging business and city government to take action. The mayor called together more than 80 community leaders to participate in a special Economic Task Force to analyze the economic climate and make recommendations to improve the quality of the city's life. After gathering feedback from more than 2,500 community leaders, the task force issued "A Call for Action." Education, the report said, must be at the center of economic renewal.

Local government, school, business, and community leaders formed a partnership to improve education, public safety, and the community's image. Since education reform was the starting point for change, the newly established Education Partnership brought together three key players: the superintendent of the Long Beach Unified School District, the president of California State University-Long Beach, and the president of Long Beach City College. Their collaborative efforts have led to systemic reforms in an urban district struggling to improve the lives of its 90,000 students.

While the Long Beach school board has carried the torch, the presidents of the university and community college have been very active in the partnership, and the mayor and city council have been supportive, say school district leaders.

The three partners work together to create academic standards, develop course outlines, align curriculum, improve academic achievement for students, enhance teacher preparation, and overcome barriers interfering with these goals. District leaders say this collaboration of educators, business, and community is currently recognized as one of the most effective examples of systemic education reform in the nation—a reform effort that extends beyond programs, departments, and colleges. The three institutions have aligned their visions, missions, goals, objectives, and action plans through strategic planning and data collection, coupled with evaluations of progress.

The three primary education institutions in the partnership are supported by a host of other organizations. Other participants include the National Education Association (NEA) in Washington, D.C., NEA affiliate unions in Long Beach, and teacher and faculty associations at the partnership institutions. Additionally, several foundations and corporations support partnership activities. Also, the partnership works closely with legislators to promote education activities and support the partnership's mission. In the six years since its inception, the partnership has gradually increased the participation of local government, businesses, foundations, and educators—to the point of attracting national attention and support from major funders such as the McConnell Clark and Annenberg Foundations.

The partnership is cochaired by three executive staff members, one from each of the education institutions, who are charged with making any necessary changes. The Long Beach school board reviews any recommendations and plans and holds periodic retreats to review major initiatives. School board members work closely with the superintendent and are very visible in the community. These educators and other partnership members adopted a strategic planning model to identify key initiatives, which were based on student need and developed by two or more of the institutions and other partners. The three institutions pay the full-time salary of an administrator, who devotes 100 percent of her time to partnership activities; a mentor teacher assigned to the administrator also devotes all her time to the partnership.

The partnership's Seamless Education Steering Committee oversees seven "launch initiatives" that are based on the school system's overall goals and plans. Described as "an extremely busy committee," the steering committee is made up of executive-level educators of the three education institutions, the chairs of the seven launch initiatives, teachers, business representatives, and invited guests. The steering committee has subcommittees and assists all other committees with their strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Committee members may serve on one or more related committees. Committees, required to meet a minimum of once a month, publish monthly and yearly progress reports.

Long Beach Superintendent Carl Cohn and the leaders of the university and community college meet monthly to monitor committee progress and provide assistance. Other participants include classroom teachers from grades K-12, faculty from higher education institutions, administrators from the three institutions, union representatives, support staff, and executive-level representatives, parents, and school board members. The Long Beach City Council and the mayor, who receive copies of all meeting minutes, frequently attend partnership meetings.

The business partners play an integral part in helping educators set their targets for preparing students for the world of work. The superintendent holds breakfast meetings for small business owners in Long Beach, so they can describe the

skills and knowledge the district's graduates will need. The partnership also receives support from numerous major corporations, as well as from the local newspaper, the Port of Long Beach, and the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau.

To ensure that all community voices were heard, representatives from all possible groups were invited to define education and community needs when the partnership began. The group developed several belief statements that expressed the value of public engagement: No reform is approved or implemented without all stakeholders' knowledge and support, and any issue or concern can be brought to the appropriate committee for reevaluation.

Because ongoing communication is critical to the effectiveness of any partnership, the school district created a communications team, which includes representation from the Education Partnership. The team has developed a variety of plans and approaches to keep all partners informed. Minutes of the meetings are disseminated to members, and negotiations are open to the general public. Any person, including members of the press, may access all documentation.

"No reform is approved or implemented without all stakeholders' knowledge and support, and any issue or concern can be brought to the appropriate committee for reevaluation."

The district's extensive collaboration with its education and other partners has resulted in a number of important and substantial changes. In March 1999, 71 percent of voters supported the passage of a $295 million school construction and facilities bond measure. "It was unprecedented that a large, urban school district passed a bond measure of this size on the first attempt," Superintendent Cohn reported in an end-of-year message.

A reading initiative, supported by the partnership, has been a key component of school district reform. The goal is to have all students read at grade level by the time they leave third grade. Since this effort began in June 1994, all prekindergarten through third-grade teachers have participated in extensive literary training and professional development. The school district and the university developed and co-taught a course for K-3 teachers. The university now requires that all students who want to earn a liberal studies degree must complete 120 hours in the K-3 classroom working on literacy. The result, the district says, is that better-prepared graduates are being accepted into the College of Education's Teacher Preparation program, and the school district is more satisfied with its new elementary school teachers.

The school district also adopted a requirement, endorsed by the Education Partnership, that any third-grade student who cannot read at third-grade level by the end of the school year will need a mandatory summer tutorial focused on the student's individual learning needs. Not a traditional summer school, this program uses any and all effective interventions.

Although the district now enjoys a strong relationship with other educational institutions, it initially faced a number of barriers to collaboration. The culture, traditions, and policies of the collaborating educational institutions had to be addressed. Communication strategies that had been agreed to in advance, as well as positive interactions among leaders and staff, helped break down barriers. Aligning strategic plans, identifying common priorities, and reallocating resources helped overcome financial challenges. The partnership was able to gain public trust—another challenge—by ensuring that the public had access to all documentation and committee meeting minutes.

The district has made notable academic gains in many areas—gains that occurred because of the collaborative efforts of teachers, administrators, classified staff, parents, the school system's partners in higher education, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, local business partners, foundations, and local, county, and state government. With support from the Education Partnership, the school board has undertaken more initiatives and become enlightened risk-takers, says Judy Seal, administrator for K-16 collaborations and external funding.

For more information, contact Carl A. Cohn, superintendent, at (562) 997-8242.
The Web site is http://www.lbusd.k12.ca.us.

This profile is excerpted from *The Community Connection: Case Studies in Public Engagement*, by Anne Wright and Judith Brody Saks. Published by the National School Boards Association, 2000.

chapter 9
Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is a habit of mind. The term itself has been so often introduced into our everyday conversations that it has become commonplace, but the concept is far from commonplace. In fact, to counter some prevalent misconceptions, let's begin by looking at continuous improvement from the point of view of what it is not. Continuous improvement is not total quality management, usually referred to as TQM. In the minds of many, TQM is synonymous with continuous improvement. The two are related, but they are not the same. TQM refers primarily to techniques or tools that can be used to promote continuous improvement. It is important to make this distinction, because many people who were exposed to TQM without appropriate grounding do not have good memories of the experience.

Continuous improvement is not just another set of management tools. Certainly, there are numerous tools and skills to be developed and implemented. There are also consistent principles that form a framework for using these tools. But no organization can consider itself to be a continuous improvement organization merely because it follows the principles and uses the tools. Continuous improvement is not simply the process itself—it is a way of thinking about everything we do. Continuous improvement brings a different perspective to an organization and how it works. Continuous improvement is a habit of mind.

What do we mean when we describe continuous improvement as a habit of mind? Continuous improvement begins with the way we think about what we do. Almost everyone has heard the cliché, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." If that observation is seen through the lens of continuous improvement, it would have to be rewritten, "When it ain't broke is the time to fix it." That might not reflect good grammar, but it does reflect good thinking. It reflects a habit of mind, a way of thinking about what we do and seeking ways to do it even better.

Continuous improvement depends on good information. It is data driven. Data constitutes the feedback loop that empowers the board and staff to seek ways to refine, strengthen, modify, or eliminate existing programs and practices—in short, to improve. Because it is data driven, continuous improvement requires that attention be given at each critical juncture to what data will be needed and how and when that data will be used. Boards need to ask two key questions:

1. What data do we need?
2. What will be the format of the data?

The objective is to find better, more efficient, and more effective ways to work.

Finally, continuous improvement is a journey, not a destination. It is not something you finish. Continuous improvement never ends. Improvements can be made to any process, if improvement is the frame of reference. In management thought, there is a maxim to the effect that routine drives out planning. It also drives out improvement. Routine unchecked becomes rut. Stable can easily become stagnant. That is not to say that "change for change's sake" is the appropriate operational framework. Rather, we must engage in a thoughtful and reflective process. The mindset of continuous improvement is to question, examine, revise, refine, and revisit.

What will it take to get there?

1. Model continuous improvement as a board. Seek ways to improve the way the board does business. Pause frequently to reflect on public meetings and other activities and seek to make them better. Ask for feedback from staff and others about ways to improve meetings and other functions of the board.

2. Adopt a customer focus. For many educators, the notion of "customer" applied to students, parents, and others is alien and offensive. It has an air of commercialism about it that is contrary to the educators' worldview. In this context, however, adopting a customer focus means understanding what we do and for whom we do it. W. Edwards Deming, one of the architects of quality management, teaches that everyone in an organization is a customer and has customers. The central question for each individual is, whom do I serve and who

serves me? Answering this question brings focus and purpose to the work we do.

3. **Make decisions based on the data.** All of us have preconceived notions about what is effective and about how things should be done. Continuous improvement requires stepping back and reconsidering those preconceived notions if the data do not support them. Mary Parker Follett, a pioneer in organizational development and management theory, was fond of saying that decisions should be made not on the basis of who is right, but what is right. Of course, some issues have philosophical or ethical overtones that override process considerations. More often, however, the real driver of decisions is past practice; the way things have always been done. We need to move away from preconceptions to critical reflection that is data based. When something is not working, boards need to stop authorizing it.

4. **Require that all programs—existing and new—have built-in data requirements.** In countless ways, at budget time and throughout the year, the board makes decisions about whether a given program should stay, go, or be modified. It is critical, therefore, that the board establishes up front what data will be collected for its review and when that data will be needed. Doing so—asking the right questions at the right time—also sends a powerful message to staff about the way the board will make decisions.

5. **Foster open communication and invite feedback.** Information is the lifeblood of continuous improvement. A climate in which open communication is valued allows people to think outside of the box and share different perspectives without fear of reprisal. Dialogue is different from discussion; dialogue invites differing perspectives and the open exploration of ideas; discussion aims at analysis and closure.

6. **Celebrate evidence of improvement and reward those who are responsible for it.** It is very easy to turn continuous improvement from a positive to a negative. Continuous improvement in education is about enlisting others to use their talents and experience to create a better school system and learning environment for children. When the efforts of those who create improvements are not recognized and rewarded, continuous improvement can rapidly give way to into a kind of perpetual crankiness. When that happens, staff and others will view the board's questions and focus as negative, and they will respond accordingly.

7. **Promote continuous improvement as an integral part of every policy and decision.** Ask the question, "How can we do this even better?" publicly and often. Make others aware that the board is every bit as serious about finding even better ways to do the things the system is already doing well, as it is about improving things the system is not doing well.

In summary, continuous improvement is not just a process; it is an attitude that must be cultivated and reinforced. This attitude is preoccupied with quality and recognizes and rewards those who produce it. Continuous improvement creates school systems that are constantly adapting, what Peter Senge calls " learning organizations." In the Information Age, any organization that is content with where it is and what it is doing presently almost certainly will fall behind. Continuous improvement is the antidote to that kind of complacency.

Continuous Improvement Self-Assessment

Use this tool to assess your initial understanding of continuous improvement and to get a sense of where you are as a board on this key action. Indicate the degree to which your board/district has achieved the following elements in establishing a culture of continuous improvement for student achievement.

	Fully Achieved	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Beginning to Achieve
Our board and our staff have had training on the principles and tools of continuous improvement.				
We have developed a culture that puts quality first among all other considerations.				
We manage by facts, and our decisions are data driven.				
We focus on our customers and clients in designing and delivering our services.				
We practice prevention and intervention rather than reaction as our primary mode of operation.				
We use problem-solving and risk-taking processes to jump start improvements.				
We use strategic planning to focus and drive our decisions and strategies for achieving our priorities.				
We practice benchmarking with other school districts and businesses.				
We treat all stakeholders with respect.				
We practice constancy of purpose.				
"Our compass points true North." (with apologies to Steven Covey)				

Continuous Improvement Questions the School Board Should Ask Itself

- Do we clearly communicate that we are committed to continuous improvement?
- Is continuous improvement built into planning processes?
- Are the programs and initiatives that are being assessed linked to short- and long-term strategic objectives?
- Does the community participate in continuous improvement discussions and planned reviews?
- Do we focus on solutions to problems instead of blaming?
- Are adjustments made and resources reallocated in a timely manner?
- Do school board members, administrators, teachers, and other staff members need continuous improvement training?

Continuous Improvement Questions the School Board Should Ask the Superintendent and Staff

- How often are program reviews conducted?
- What measures and indicators are used to provide feedback on achievement initiatives?
- How are assessments used to adjust curriculum and instruction?
- How are findings reported to the staff and public? Do they have the information they need, in an understandable format, for informed discussion?
- Can data be disaggregated to help structure solutions to problems?
- What is being done to create a customer focus?
- Do evaluations identify how staff members needs to improve and what improvement goals they need to set?

Roles of the Board and the Superintendent in Continuous Improvement	
The school board	The superintendent
1. Follows a regular process to review student achievement data to ensure continuous improvement.	1a. Recommends to the board a process for continuous improvement. 1b. Sets and reviews benchmarks and performance indicators that demonstrate student progress related to district strategic plan and standards. 1c. Provides clear analysis of relevant data related to student achievement. 1d. Seeks input from professional staff on changes needed to strengthen instructional programs. 1e. Recommends changes to instructional program indicated by data and staff input.
2. Takes part in training on principles of continuous improvement, including use of data and customer focus.	2a. chedules training on principles of continuous improvement and participates with the board. 2b. Ensures ongoing training for all employees on principles of continuous improvement. 2c. Ensures professional development to build understanding of information provided by data and to encourage staff participation in needed changes.
3. Participates in work sessions to better understand needed changes in curriculum and instruction based on related data.	3a. Presents information to the board on needed curriculum/instruction changes. 3b. Explains data to support recommended changes.
4. Provides funding for continuous improvement.	4a. Reviews curriculum and instruction plans and costs as part of the board's budget planning. 4b. Presents budget recommendations to the board on resources needed for continuous improvement
5. Adopts board policies that support continuous improvement.	5a. Recommends policies needed to support continuous improvement efforts. 5b. Conducts periodic review with the board to identify additional policies needed or to revise existing ones.
6. Supports publicly and communicates the value of continuous improvement to the community.	6a. Communicates the process and results of the district's continuous improvement efforts to key stakeholders as part of the district's communications plan. 6b. Communicates both proposed and approved curriculum and instruction changes to the stakeholders affected, such as students, staff, and parents.

Planning Team Considerations for Developing a Plan for Continuous Improvement

1. What will our board need to create an ongoing program of board development, planning, and team building?
2. What resources in our community can we draw on to help us begin to develop a culture of continuous improvement?
3. What can we do to help the staff in our district become eager to participate in a continuous improvement process?
4. Does our district promote risk taking? Does it reward individual and group efforts to promote student achievement? If not, what steps will be necessary to make these things happen?

Resources on Continuous Improvement

Annenberg Institute for School Reform. A Framework for Accountability.
http://www.aisr.brown.edu/accountability/framework/pgone.html.

The Annenberg Institute's Framework for Accountability offer schools and other learning organizations a way to approach accountability as a continuous process of improvement. It promotes the ongoing and reflective use of data to meet school and community expectations. The inquiry cycle of the process entails six activities that guide the institution toward a process of proactive continuous improvement that becomes integrated into the school culture. The Institute's Tools for Accountability project is developing a "multidrawer toolkit," soon to be available through the Web site, that offers a clearinghouse of practices and methods for collecting and analyzing data for use in accountability. Each drawer presents rationale, uses, specific examples, and additional resources in a specific area or practice.

At Your Fingertips; Using Everyday Data to Improve Schools. MPR Associates, 1998, 208 pp., additional worksheets.

Schools and districts can use this resource book to evaluate school data as a tool for school improvement planning. The manual provides step-by-step guidance and tools to help educators collect, analyze, and use data to make informed decisions that lead to improved student achievement. The publication is available from MPR, (800) 677-6987; *http://www.mprinc.com*

Baldrige in Education: Improving Student Performance. National Alliance of Business and the American Productivity and Quality Center, 2000. 20 pp.

This brochure was produced by BiE IN, a partnership of 26 key national education and business organizations that have joined together to help states, districts, and communities build, accelerate, and sustain continuous improvement in student achievement and system performance. It presents a strategy for aligning standards, assessments and accountability through the Baldrige Criteria, a framework through which local stakeholders and communities can assume leadership in transforming their education systems. The Baldrige Model for Education provides seven criteria that form the architecture of improvement for all levels of the education system-from the classroom to the state house. More information about the Baldrige in Education Initiative is available at
http://www.nab.com/Content/EducationImprovement/QualityManagement_Baldrige/biein.htm

Ginsburg, Alan. *Continuous Improvement Management Guide for 21st Century Schools*. PowerPoint presentation available at *http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/eval/21cent/21stc.html*.

Ongoing self-assessment and self-evaluation are critical for ensuring that an educational program is meeting its objectives and having a positive impact on the community it serves. The U.S. Department of Education has developed this presentation about the continuous improvement management process for schools, as well as a publication about the continuous improvement management process for community learning centers.

King, M. Bruce and Fred M. Newmann. "Will Teacher Learning Advance School Goals?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 2000, pp. 576-580.

The authors contend that, to be effective, professional development should address three dimensions of school capacity: (1) teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions; (2) the strength of the schoolwide professional community; and (3) the coherence of the school program. A school's instructional capacity is enhanced when its programs for students and staff learning are coherent, focused on clear learning goals, and sustained over time.

Public Sector Continuous Improvement Guide.
http://deming.eng.clemson.edu/pub/psci/online.html

This detailed web site contains links to numerous resources on continuous improvement, total quality management, and related management concepts in their application to the public sector.

Walker, Sherry Freeland. "Ohio Has Head start on Data Collection." *State Education Leader*, Winter 1998, pp. 18-19. Published by the Education Commission of the States, *http://www.ecs.org*

This article describes Ohio's effort to collect education data efficiently in order to arrive at benchmarks for individual districts and schools. A district, for example, can look at the spending pattern of its elementary schools and compare it with similar districts. Through its data-collection program, Ohio is beginning to examine the relationship of expenditures to performance and the use of these data to improve student achievement. The article describes how Ohio is learning to make improvements in its data-collection system and encourage better use of the data by school districts.

Wilson, Lorraine L. "Targeting Student Learning Refocuses the Policy Process." *Updating School Board Policies*, April/May 1999, pp. 1-4.
Five state school boards associations have joined forces to address the policymaking role of school boards in the emerging standards-based education system. They have attempted to refocus the policymaking process so it is better integrated with district priorities and planning. They have identified eight critical student learning policy categories, together with specific policy topics. School boards wishing to evaluate their policies for relevance to student learning can use these policy categories and topics to establish an agenda of policy issues that need to be addressed. Full text is available at
http://www.nsba.org/nepn/newsletter/599.htm.

A Profile of Community Engagement in Continuous Improvement

Pinellas County, Florida

This large, urban district on Florida's west coast—the seventh biggest school system in the state and still growing—spans 50 miles, from the Pasco County Line to the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. Still under a 1971 federal court desegregation order, which may soon be lifted, the Pinellas County Schools operate a court-ordered busing system. Some students ride 45 minutes on a bus to reach schools located 20-25 miles from home. Pockets of poverty dot the landscape.

Undeterred by its size or economic problems—40 percent of its 107,000 students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch—the district is completely focused on attaining the highest student achievement possible. Not satisfied with what it terms "random acts of achievement," Pinellas County has chosen to improve continually and systemically the performance of students, staff, and the entire school organization. With their expressed intent to empower the community, district leaders involve the public in critical decisions all along the way.

"Not satisfied with what it terms 'random acts of achievement,' Pinellas County has chosen to improve continually and systemically the performance of students, staff, and the entire school organization."

The Pinellas County Schools have always involved community members, although not necessarily in the strategic planning process. In 1991, however, the state legislature passed the Education and Accountability Act, which called for the active involvement of parents, guardians, business people, and other community members in school improvement and accountability efforts. Over the next nine years, business and community leaders, as well as parents, joined forces, and eventually students also participated in the strategic planning process that the district calls its Integrated Management System (IMS). The IMS is a structured approach that ensures that the principles of "quality" management are systemically and consistently applied, and that all educational components are linked.

The district adopted total quality management (TQM), a philosophy and set of practices based on the internationally acclaimed work of W. Edwards Deming. To maximize success, Deming said, organizations must create a clearly defined sense of purpose to improve products and services and must work continually to strengthen their organization. TQM chiefly relies on a rational decision-making process that is based on hard data and not emotion or opinion.

The system's goal is to meet "customer requirements" for student achievement and to continually improve the processes that make high achievement possible. State standards and research determine those requirements. Community members, parents, and teachers evaluate how well the requirements are being met by completing surveys and participating in focus groups. "The success of our system has created requests for information and training from states across the nation and from several foreign countries that are seeking to define customer requirements through community engagement," says Kenneth L. Rigsby, executive director of Quality, Employee Learning, and Planning Systems. A photograph in the 1998-99 District Comprehensive Plan underscores how pervasive the TQM philosophy is in the district. The photo shows a Pinellas County teacher wearing a T-shirt that says: "All I need to know about students I learned from my data."

To help staff understand TMQ, Pinellas County brought in an outside company, AT&T Paradyne, to train top district and teachers association leaders in TQM principles, and it partnered with AT&T and Florida Power and Light—a Deming prizewinner—to apply best practices and ways to promote the use of TQM for school improvement. The school system formed a District Quality Council to ensure that all stakeholders shared a common vision and constancy of purpose. The council integrated quality management strategies with existing components of the comprehensive planning and budgeting system. Next, the district piloted a collaborative collective bargaining process. Collaborative decision-making processes were developed by a Collaborative Quality Council, consisting of the superintendent, a deputy superintendent, the quality coordinator, the teachers' association president, the executive director of the teachers and support services' union, and the president of the County Council of PTAs. District leaders have said that including the teachers union in the TQM

movement from the beginning is a key to its success.

A Quality Academy was the third essential initiative. Business and community leaders agreed to join the school system in establishing this academy, the research-and-development arm of the district. Its focus is on transforming the district into a high-performance organization seeking increasingly higher levels of achievement. Considered the linchpin of the school system's communitywide initiative, the academy works to move the district to the next level in the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria, a national framework for high performance. The framework includes seven critical criteria (customer focus and satisfaction, strategic planning, performance results, leadership, management of process, human resource development and management, and information and analysis) that drive high performance in all organizations. The Quality Academy works with all groups, from the local school board and community to professionals across the country, and Rigsby says it has been very successful in its ability to support the district's transformation. In 1993 the district won the Governor's Sterling Award, which is designed to promote, encourage, and recognize excellence based on the principles of leadership, employee involvement, customer satisfaction, and continuous improvement.

The district also established strategic planning partnerships with a wide variety of agencies and institutions, such as the University of South Florida and the National Education Association's National Center for Innovation. The university provides training to teacher interns who will teach in the Pinellas County Schools. The NEA's innovation center coordinates the Learning Laboratories Initiative, of which Pinellas County is a part. Through the business community at large, the district was able to develop more than 5,000 school-based partnerships. The Tampa Bay Total Quality Management Network, Inc., which includes more than 300 major community organizations, served as a resource. The Pinellas County Education Foundation, involving more than 700 companies, supports the school system and the Quality Academy in numerous ways. For example, it recruits business volunteers to serve as mentors, trainers, examiners, and consultants to the academy staff and the schools.

With the help of its community partners, the school district established the Quality Academy Advisory Board, which helped adapt the nationally recognized Malcolm Baldrige Award for Quality criteria to best fit the school system. In 1994, the school system inaugurated the Superintendent's Quality Challenge (SQC), based on the criteria of the Baldrige and Sterling awards. The SQC, which creates a supportive framework for all school system employees, has two goals. It recognizes and commends schools and departments whose teachers and administrators demonstrate that they have internalized quality management principles and values. Its second goal is to help schools and departments establish baselines and standards for continuous improvement, using the SQC's assessment criteria as compass points. Under the system, schools work with technical support groups, whose trained consultants help them complete an award application that contains a self-assessment. Specially trained internal and external quality professionals review those materials and offer advice based on assessment results.

Believing in a systemic approach to improvement, the school district works hard to align and coordinate all its efforts. The school board writes and implements improvement plans. The cabinet, or top management, conducted a self-assessment and used the feedback for improvement. All schools and departments complete improvement plans with long- and short-term goals. School improvement plans are aligned to the Baldrige Criteria; the evaluations of the superintendent, district administrator, and principals are also aligned to those criteria and to student achievement results. The teaching staff uses a similar model, the Classroom Learning System Self-Assessment, which asks teachers to evaluate their own success not by what they teach but by how much students learn. The community understands what students should be learning, because the district is very clear about its expectations for students, which are aligned to state standards.

Ensuring continuing public engagement has not been easy, however. To address the large size and socioeconomic variability of the school system, the district has relied on its integrated management system as its universal strategic planning and operating framework. Through that system, all schools and community members share the same goals and constancy of purpose, focus on results, understand the importance of their roles in decision making, understand the importance of aligning all processes, and use data to drive decisions.

In the Pinellas County Schools, increased student performance is the ultimate measure of success, and the district has shown overall improvement in nationally normed and state criterion-based tests over several years.

For more information, contact Kenneth L. Rigsby, executive director, Quality, Employee Learning, and Planning Systems, at (727) 588-6295. The district's Web site is at *http://www.pinellas.k12.fl.us*.

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